

DRAGON+

**EXCLUSIVE
PREVIEWS:**

**Delving into the
Dungeon of
the Mad Mage**

D&D/MAGIC
**AN ISSUE BIG ENOUGH
FOR BOTH WORLDS**

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

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ISSUE 22

DRAGON+ 22

Welcome to Issue 22

It's time to don our best costumes for this autumnal issue!



Imagining the Ampersand

Dragon+ cover artist Magali Villeneuve shows off the natural talent behind her work for the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica*.



Waterdeep's Movie Moments

Artists Tyler Jacobson and Cynthia Sheppard explain the origins of their Waterdeep covers and why it helps to embrace a touch of the weird at Wizards of the Coast.



Magic Cards

Pick a card, any card. That's your new magic item! Chris Tulach and Kat Kruger discuss how to successfully combine



Streaming Highlights

This issue we highlight upcoming livestream games based on the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* and plunder D&D Beyond for cosplay tips.



Art and Arcana

Dragon+ spoke with Kyle Newman, Jon Peterson and brothers Michael and Sam Witwer about their visual history of Dungeons & Dragons.



Betrayal Legacy

Lead Designer Rob Daviau reveals how the mystery will



Axis & Allies & Zombies

Long-time fan Scott Van Essen used a three-decade love affair with *Axis & Allies* to create an undead variant of the classic war game. *Dragon+* met up with him to discuss zombie mechanics and learn why players should embrace the chaos.

deepen in *Betrayal Legacy*.



The Best of the DMs Guild

DMs Guild Adept Shawn Merwin chats with creator Dan Dillon about his experiences in the industry and highlights other material from contributors to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*.

Learning with D&D

In issue 21, we asked experts running gaming clubs to share their invaluable advice on adding younger players to their D&D games. This issue, Speech and Language Pathologist **Carey Olsen Findley** explains how playing Dungeons & Dragons can aid the development of children with learning difficulties.



Dragon Classic



Unearthed Arcana: Dragonmarks

Discussing the social, political and practical aspects of dragonmarks in the world of Eberron.



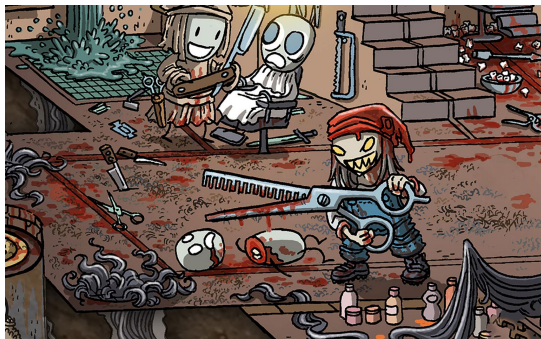
Cosplay: Dress To Kill

From rocking the Dungeon Master look to dressing as Darth Vader and the Predator, professional and amateur cosplayers talk us through their characters.



Memento Mori

If the dungeons don't get you, the dragons will! Members of the extended D&D family share the pain of a major character death.



Comic: Yugoloths

Jason Thompson provides some holiday treats, plus other cartoony goodness!



Fiction: Neera - Final Exam & Best Friends

The hidden past of Beamdog's wild mage, Neera—how a staff was gained and a forest imperiled...



Neverwinter's Amazing New Acquisition

How do you get the Acquisitions Incorporated crew interested in a Neverwinter franchise? Pitch them some prime real estate (not to mention sweet tax incentives from Lord Neverremember himself). *Dragon+* spoke with Penny Arcade's Jerry Holkins and *Neverwinter* Lead Designer Thomas Foss about a tantalizing opportunity.



Next Issue: Dragon+ 23

Join our stream of consciousness in the next exciting edition of *Dragon+*!



DRAGON+ 22

Welcome to Issue 22

It's time to don our best costumes for this autumnal issue!

A quick word about the *Dragon+* platforms. You're reading this now on your favorite device, with *Dragon+* available for free on [iOS](#), [Android](#), as well as online at [Dragonmag.com](#). However, you may not know that we also livestream *Dragon+* discussions every Tuesday at 2:00 p.m. PT on [Twitch.tv/dnd](#).

In part, the *Dragon+* livestream let's us look under the hood and examine content heading into each issue. For example, we speak regularly with Jeremy Crawford about Unearthed Arcana, as well as draw new cartoons with Stan! and other guest artists.

The livestream is also a time when we can discuss the operations of *Dragon+*. Some months back, this included our announcement about shifting publication dates earlier. While we previously published at the end of every other month, we now publish near the beginning. In no small part this was to provide an earlier “shelf life” for our seasonal issues—including this one. In other words, we wanted the October issue to come out further in advance of Halloween for a longer lead-up to the holiday!



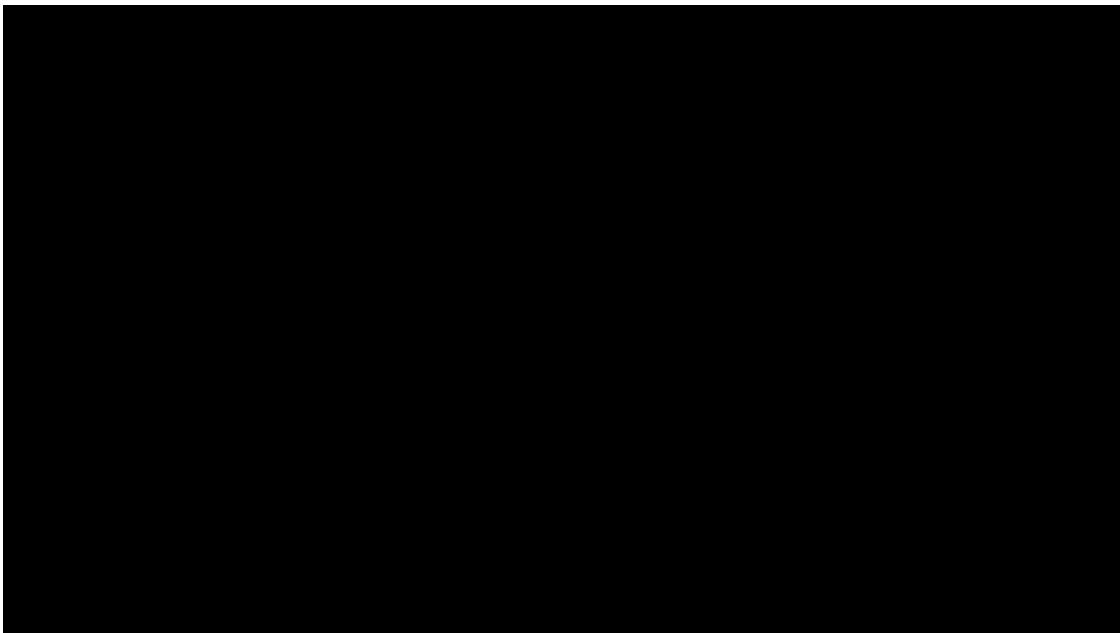
Sadly, I've never had strong skills in costuming myself. There was an early Halloween when I wore my Darth Vader outfit to school and

managed to split the crotch during gym class. In my defense, store-bought costumes were mostly tissue-thin plastic back then but the Dark Lord of the Sith with tighty whities peeking through did not make for an intimidating sight. Then there was the Halloween when all of my friends dressed as Army soldiers (a no-brainer, as we lived on an army base) but for whatever reason I decided to switch tracks at the last minute and showed up as a knight. There we were trick-or-treating, a platoon of grizzled soldiers... with one medieval knight in their midst (maybe there's a movie in that...).

On a recent *Dragon+* livestream, Chris Perkins shared his own Halloween story. It involves a boxy robot costume, an act of unbalancing, and Chris spending much of the night face down on someone's lawn.

WATCH ON TWITCH

When researching material for this issue, I wondered if D&D characters ever donned costumes for special holidays. Of course, characters wear disguises all the time; to this day, I'll forever love the *Force Grey: Lost City of Omu* episode where the party disguises one of Tyril Tallguy's summoned animals as a great frog goddess, in order to trick a grung chieftain. But for a holiday?



Suddenly, there it was in *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*. Fey Day (page 184) is when the veil between this world and the Feywild is thought

to be weakest, and as the wealthy host elaborate costume balls, “poorer folk don costumes of their own make and travel door to door, gaining brief entry into the celebrations in exchange for performing a song or a short play.”

So it seems that even within world, folks love a good costume, and for this issue we’ll look at some truly awesome cosplaying! As for treats, we’ve also got you covered—with an inside look at *Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, *Axis & Allies & Zombies*, and *Betrayal Legacy*. And when it comes to ghoulies and ghosties, we’ll also look back at memorable character deaths (including a memorial for the recently departed Binwin). Plus, we even bring you some new yugoloth magic items courtesy of Jason Thompson!

So enjoy the issue—and may your own costumes never split!

Bart Carroll, Digital Marketing Manager



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IN THE WORKS



In The Works

In *Dragon+ 21* we resurrected our *In the Works* column, offering **an early look** at products on the horizon. After all, there's more than a few D&D-related goodies to watch for later this year. Amazingly, there's even more for us to discuss this issue!

So let's just see what's in the works...

WATERDEEP, DUNGEON OF THE MAD MAGE

It's the greatest dungeon of them all... and on November 13th, gamers everywhere will be able to explore Undermountain for themselves! *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* takes players into the largest, deepest dungeon in the Forgotten Realms as it touches on every major level of that vast, dangerous place.

Designed for characters 5th through 20th level, you can run *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* as a standalone adventure or use it in conjunction with its precursor story, *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, which takes characters from 1st to 5th level.

Curious about the history of this place? Halaster Blackcloak (fully statted out in the book's appendix) journeyed from a distant land to the base of Mount Waterdeep more than a thousand years ago. Whatever the wizard's true origin (whether he hailed from the Cradlelands or Netheril), scholars have recorded that Halaster brought with him seven apprentices.

With the Seven guarding his back, Halaster tapped into his immense power to summon beings from other planes of existence to help him build a wizard's tower to dwarf all other wizard's towers. But as the seasons wore on the Seven saw less and less of their enigmatic

master. Halaster continued to use fell creatures from distant planes for tunneling and other construction beneath his tower, and the wizard kept the nature of most of his underground dealings a secret from the Seven. Eventually, Halaster's exploration broke into the Underhalls, a complex of tunnels and rooms built by dwarves around a mithral mine beneath Mount Waterdeep.

Using his underground complex as a base of operations, Halaster traveled to other planes and distant lands, collecting strange and dangerous creatures to live as prisoners, servants, or guardians in Undermountain.

Of course, all this occurred many years prior. Since then, the city of Waterdeep developed in the shadow of Mount Waterdeep and spread down to the harbor. An intrepid adventurer named Durnan demolished the remains of Halaster's tower and built an inn, the Yawning Portal, over the same well he'd used to descend into Undermountain (later returning with riches and countless harrowing tales).



(Select to view)

Now the opportunity presents itself for new adventurers willing to pay Durnan the 1 gp fee, to descend into the well and explore the mega-dungeon of Undermountain on their own—and hopefully return with their own harrowing tales!

In a couple of pages we'll hear from Cynthia Sheppard about her cover art for the book. For further insight, here's the art order that went to Cynthia:

HALASTER at the bottom, maybe his hair fanned out, his RING HAND raised. Halaster has an unsettling glare with more than a hint of madness in his eyes. He wears a coat of many eyes—consider fanning it across the cover, front to back. He's fond of using ARCANE RUNES to trigger deadly traps throughout his dungeon.

In addition, here are the art orders and illos for three further pieces. First, the entrance to Undermountain via the Yawning Portal (courtesy of Sidharth Chaturvedi):

*This illustration depicts three **STREET URCHINS** playing in the **YAWNING PORTAL TAVERN**. They're messing around with the rope hoist that is used to lower adventurers down the taproom's central well into Undermountain. One or two of them might be hanging from the rope. Depending on how the composition is framed, we might see **DURNAN**, the tavern's stern proprietor, smirking behind the bar in the background, and maybe a few patrons as well.*



(Select to view)

Taking a quick look at level one of the dungeon, we have this piece from Eric Belisle:

*This illustration depicts a **FEMALE LIGHTFOOT HALFLING ROGUE** confronting a hungry **MANTICORE** in a large dungeon room. The scene captures a moment before, during, or after the halfling dodges one or more tail spikes flung at her by the manticore.*



(Select to view)

And for those that survive, a peek at level two from Cory Tregoe-Erdner:

An adventurer comes across a pair of RUST MONSTERS fighting over and feeding on a RUSTY HELM. The rust monsters are each about four or five feet long, and they seem more interested in the helm than the approaching wizard.



(Select to view)

Interested in learning more? We'll be releasing further *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* preview content via Spoilers & Swag/Extra Life.

[More Info](#)

DUNGEON OF THE MAD MAGE, MAPS & MISCELLANY

Granted, that with a dungeon as vast and sprawling as Undermountain it helps to have handy resources at your disposal. That's just what this accessory aims to provide—a durable folder containing cardstock sheets designed for use with dry-erase markers and pens. Printed on these sheets are the following resources to help you run *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*:

- Thirteen double-sided black & white maps of dungeon levels contained within Undermountain.
- Three perforated sheets of Elder Rune and Secrets cards relevant to gameplay.

[More Info](#)

GUILDMASTER'S GUIDE TO RAVNICA

In our previous *In the Works* column we introduced the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica*—the perfect blend of story from the creators of *Magic: The Gathering*, wrapped around the rules, monsters, and spells of fifth edition Dungeons & Dragons. Play a member of your favorite guild as you explore all the mystery and adventure within the grand city of Ravnica.



Later this issue we'll look at new groups livestreaming D&D Ravnica play—including the folks from the Saving Throw Show. Their new series, *The Broken Pact*, premieres Saturday October 13th on [twitch.tv/dnd](https://www.twitch.tv/dnd), starring DM Reuben Bresler and players Gaurav Gulati, Jordan Pridgen, Ashlen Rose, and Riley Silverman.

For other groups looking to play D&D in Ravnica, several resources exist to help run your game. As tensions between the guilds run high, the streets of Ravnica have never been more perilous. A good set of dice may just save your hide—for this, there's the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* premium dice. This set includes one d20, one d12, two d10s, one d8, four d6s, one d4—as well as one guild die.

More Info

In addition, there's also the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* Maps and Miscellany. Much like *Dungeon of the Mad Mage's* accessory, this durable folder includes twenty cardstock sheets designed for use with dry-erase markers and pens, and includes:

- Seven double-sided color maps of Ravnica's Tenth District, with and without number tags, and including helpful quick-reference information about each district.
- Eleven double-sided black-and-white maps of adventure sites associated with Ravnica's guilds, with and without number tags, with helpful tables and reference on the back.

Two perforated sheets of color Faces of Ravnica cards (eighteen cards total) you can use as random NPCs.

[More Info](#)

DUNGEON MAYHEM

Jordan Comar and Roscoe Wetlaufer were looking for a fun, quick card game that would help introduce Dungeons & Dragons to new players. What they came up with is *Dungeon Mayhem*, an action-packed D&D card game where you win by being the last adventurer standing.

As discussed on a recent *Dragon+* livestream, an earlier design of the game involved a single, communal deck of cards. With input from Mike Mearls gameplay evolved into each player using a deck associated with one of the four brave, quirky characters (who Mike also named and created backstories for): Sutha the Skullcrusher (barbarian), Azzan the Mystic (wizard), Lia the Radiant (paladin), and Oriax the Clever (rogue), all illustrated by Kyle Ferrin.



For a look at the gameplay in action, Nathan Stewart and Kate Welch ran through a few rounds on the recent Spoilers & Swag livestream:



[Watch on Twitch](#)

Shelly Mazzanoble and Jordan Comar also appeared on a *Dragon+* stream to talk more about the genesis of the game, playtesting with Seattle Seahawks #22 C.J. Prosise, and what makes *Dungeon Mayhem* a good “beer and combos” game.

[Watch on Twitch](#)

[More Info](#)

AVALON HILL BOARD GAMES

This issue, we cover the following two board games in depth. For now, here’s a quick introduction!

Axis & Allies & Zombies: *Fighting a world war is hard enough without a zombie curse.*

In this new game in the *Axis & Allies* series you command one of the five major powers, charged with planning a strategy to win the war. But each battle provides more fresh corpses for the flesh-eating hordes, and the problem is getting out of hand. With your human enemies on one side, and the ravenous undead on the other, it is time to ask yourself, “Do I invest in tanks or chainsaw tanks?”

Look for the game October 26th, just in time for Halloween.

[More Info](#)

Betrayal Legacy: *Every house has a story. This one is yours.*

Last year, we covered the making of *Betrayal at Baldur's Gate* in [Dragon+ 15](#). We also provided a unique holiday haunt for that game in [Dragon+ 17](#). Now, we're thrilled to talk about the next game in the series, *Betrayal Legacy*. As a legacy-style game you'll have the unique experience of creating the iconic house's story through decisions and actions taken in the game; then, once the campaign is complete, you'll be left with a fully re-playable, customized board game.

Look for the game November 9th.

[More Info](#)

EXTRA LIFE

Extra Life is a charity organization D&D has been happy to be involved with since 2013, where gamers stream themselves playing together with the express purpose of driving donations to the Children's Hospitals Network. In 2017 the D&D team added several projects to the DMs Guild in support of Extra Life. This year we're working on a special *Dragon+* adventure scenario for the [DMs Guild](#), which takes place in the Barrier Peaks:

Laboratory of Kwalish explores an alternate expedition into the Barrier Peaks as players search for the lost lab of the legendary artificer. He disappeared in the peaks eons ago... as it turns out, finding a crashed planar ship and studying its technology to fuel his own research.

As always we'd encourage you to consider any of the material currently available on the DMs Guild. Proceeds for the following continue to raise funds towards Extra Life:

[The Turtle Package](#)

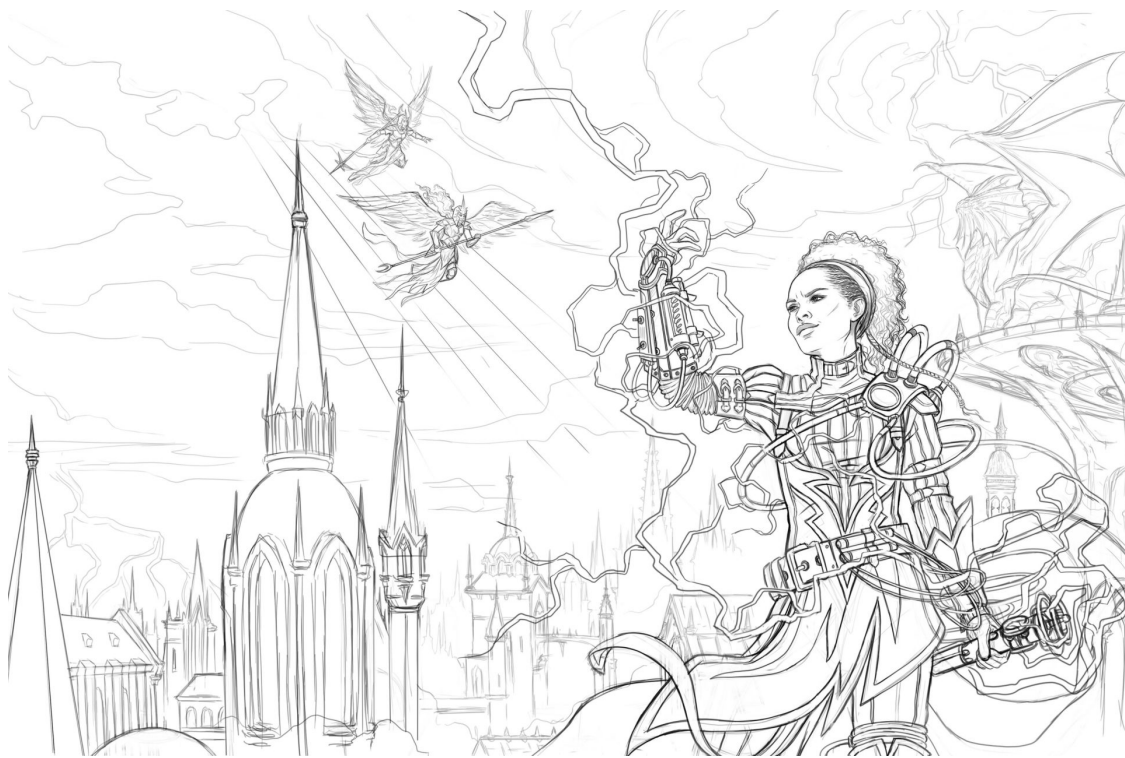
One Grung Above

The Lost Kenku

X Marks the Spot

And we encourage you to donate to the Extra Life cause by joining the D&D Extra Life team itself! Find out more at dnd.wizards.com/extralife.

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Imagining the Ampersand

Dragon+ cover artist Magali Villeneuve shows off the natural talent behind her work for the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica*.

It's worth taking another good look at the art at the top of this page. Flick back to the cover of this issue of *Dragon+* or check out the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* to see it more fully. That impressive figure bathing in electricity, a smile on her face as she harnesses its power, would be enough to make any teacher proud. Which makes our conversation with Magali Villeneuve even more astounding.

“I am completely self-taught,” says the French illustrator when *Dragon+* asks about her work for the Dungeons & Dragons and *Magic: The Gathering* crossover sourcebook. “I never took any art classes.”

Villeneuve first started drawing when she was around 12 years old, copying characters from animated movies. “When I was younger I

wanted to work as an animator for Disney, as I was a huge fan of their work and I still am. I really began learning all by myself, starting by drawing figures and other things by imitating the artists I liked. Then years later when I started to think about making my living as an artist, I became more serious and used books to learn about anatomy and colors.”

Now a veteran when it comes to *Magic: The Gathering*, Villeneuve was one of the artists brought in to work on the original concept art for *Guildmasters’ Guide to Ravnica*. She worked on a number of guilds featured in the book but was especially involved with the Golgari and Izzet.

“The female figure is a character from the Izzet guild, so I was already used to that design,” she says. “But I really like creating new characters and she was designed from scratch, so that was a lot of fun. They had a precise idea of what was important in the composition: the lady first, then the city, then the dragon. It was really important to have that dragon in the background.

“I was asked to create a strong female character who was a really cool customer with a lot of power. She had to be the master of electricity and had to look confident and like someone you don’t want to mess with.”



Izzet Guild personified (select to view)

We think you’ll agree; mission accomplished.

How did you get started in the industry?

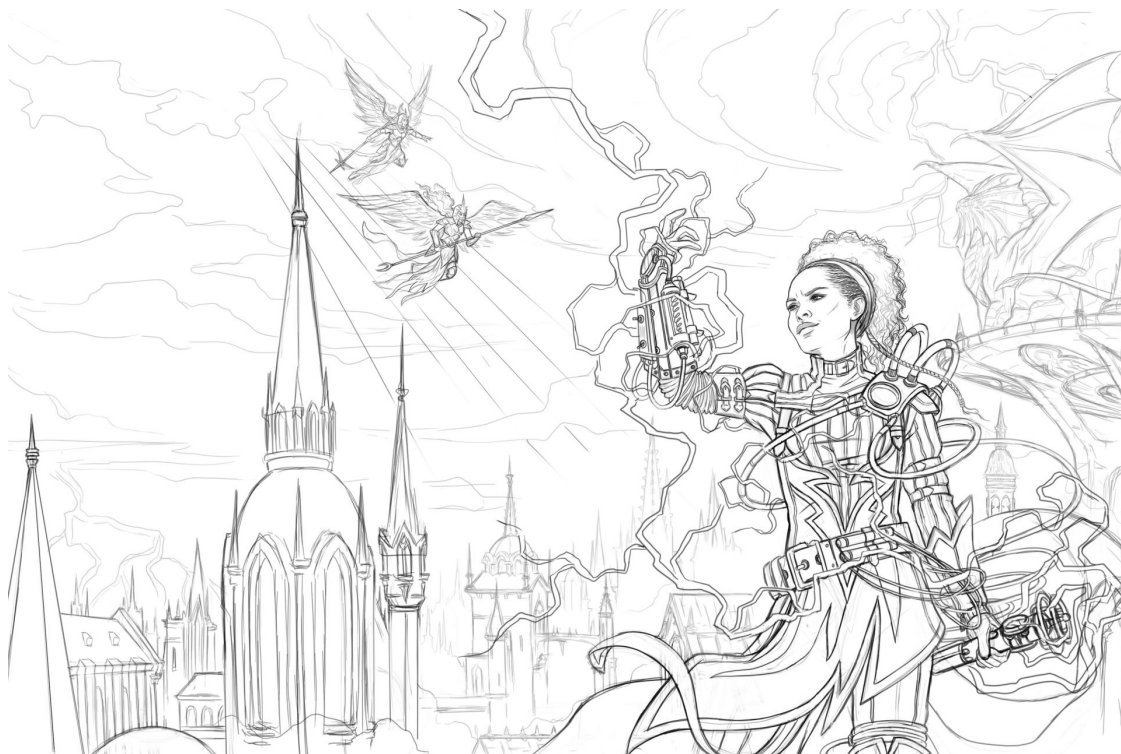
When I first started 12 years ago I can’t say I had a good level of skill, but I tried it anyway. I still love making book covers because fantasy novels are what drew me to illustration. That was my goal and I dreamed of doing illustrations for *Lord of the Rings* or *Game of*

Thrones. I sent my work to really tiny publishers at first and that's how I got started.

Has that continued to be a big part of your work?

Through the years I've started doing more illustrations for games—card games in general. But every now and then I get a commission from a publisher and it's like coming back to where everything started. Working from book extracts was my first motivation and is a different challenge. Especially when you're working on a famous series like *Red Rising* or *Game of Thrones*, because it's not just about what the publisher wants, it's also about what the writer wants.

So you spend a lot of time on the internet trying to get to know the whole world. You have to really pay attention and soak up the descriptions. For a series like *Red Rising*, I spend a lot of time looking at fan-made illustrations, as that's a good way to learn how the characters are supposed to look.



(Select to view)

What's your process like?

I tend to rely on what I have in mind and I might do only one or two sketches and no more than that. More often than not I will only send one sketch to the client. I often feel I'm being hired because I draw with a lot of detail, so it might be a traditional sketch I then clean

digitally because I don't want to send something too simple or rough.



(Select to view)

I like to send something where the costume and character design is all there, as if it was ready to paint. Once the sketch phase has been

approved, I go for color. This is completely digital, painting with Photoshop and a Cintiq tablet.

How close was the initial pitch to the final piece of art on our cover?

It's really close. The brief was very precise and they had a very clear idea of what they wanted. It's always wonderful when that happens. In my experience when a client says, 'Go crazy! Do what you think is best!' it makes everyone's life more complicated because you're all left trying to find the right direction. In this case, they knew what the composition had to be and there were only a few revisions on the sketch. A change of expression and that was it.

Was there anything you did differently to combine the worlds of *Magic: The Gathering* and D&D?

It's different every time you design a book cover. You have to think about so many more elements. When you are painting a regular piece for *Magic: The Gathering* you have the frame and the illustration and you don't have any text on the image. On a book cover, the challenge is to make it look impressive but understand that at some point a title and a logo will be added. In that case it's more important to think about the illustration looking good as a whole than to think about the art by itself. You never want an image to be spoiled by a title.



Vraska, Golgari Queen (Select to view)

Was there a particular piece of art that made them think you'd be perfect for this?

When you see my *Magic: The Gathering* work you will notice there are lots of female characters there. As this cover included a custom-designed, strong female character, that was one of the motivations for them to choose me.

But this was my first work ever for D&D so it was a huge honor.

D&D is huge—it's the same everywhere in the world including here in France. So getting to work on it as an illustrator is something you can usually only dream of.

You have friends who play D&D. When you finally join them what character would you like to play?

If I could play someone really evil I would love that, because I really want to make people's lives miserable if that's possible. [Laughs] I'd play a really cool, elegant and dangerous character.

Your party may end up killing you if your character is too evil!

But if I can do a lot of bad stuff in the meantime before I die, that's not a problem. [Laughs]

You can find more of Magali Villeneuve's work on [her official website](#) and buy art prints, proofs, tokens, playmats and original drawings at [her online store](#).

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WATERDEEP DUNGEON OF THE MAD MAGE™



THE GREATEST DUNGEON OF THEM ALL!

Explore the mega-dungeon of
Undermountain in this adventure for the
world's greatest roleplaying game.



Waterdeep's Movie Moments

Artists Tyler Jacobson and Cynthia Sheppard explain the origins of their Waterdeep covers and why it helps to embrace a touch of the weird at Wizards of the Coast.

Mark Bonington

For many players, the art of Dungeons & Dragons is a portal into the brand. It draws them in, makes turning the pages such a delight and inspires them to keep creating characters and writing new stories. Fond memories of rifling through the *Monster Manual* or seeing new creatures and environments brought to life in other source books are retained through many a player's lifetime.

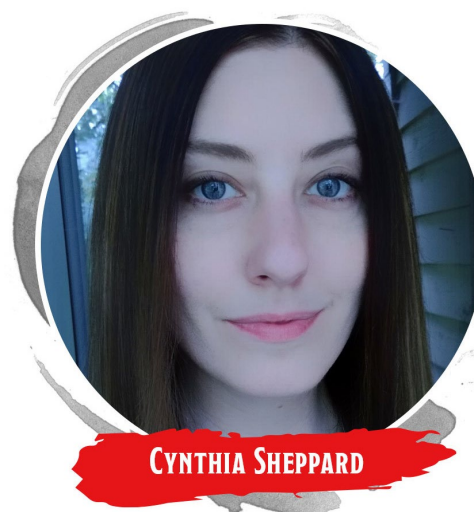
As we celebrate the availability of two adventures set in Waterdeep we chat with *Dragon Heist* and *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* cover artists Tyler Jacobson and Cynthia Sheppard about their radical change in style from previously published D&D works.

Designing a Cover

“I wanted to try something a little riskier,” says artist Tyler Jacobson. As the creator of the cover for *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* it was his vision that set the template for the connected works, with *Magic: The Gathering*'s Art Director Cynthia Sheppard following up with the cover for *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*.

Jacobson says his breakaway style for this urban adventure came from a determination that the composition would be something new.

“I really wanted to create something in the style of a movie poster, because the book had the feel of a movie to me,” he says. “So I set out to create a cover that felt like it was for an '80s film. It's basically a montage poster and is a style that was made popular by an artist named Drew Struzan, who was famous for his *Star Wars* work. I asked the D&D team to let me try it, and although it sounded a little crazy they trusted me to pull it off.”

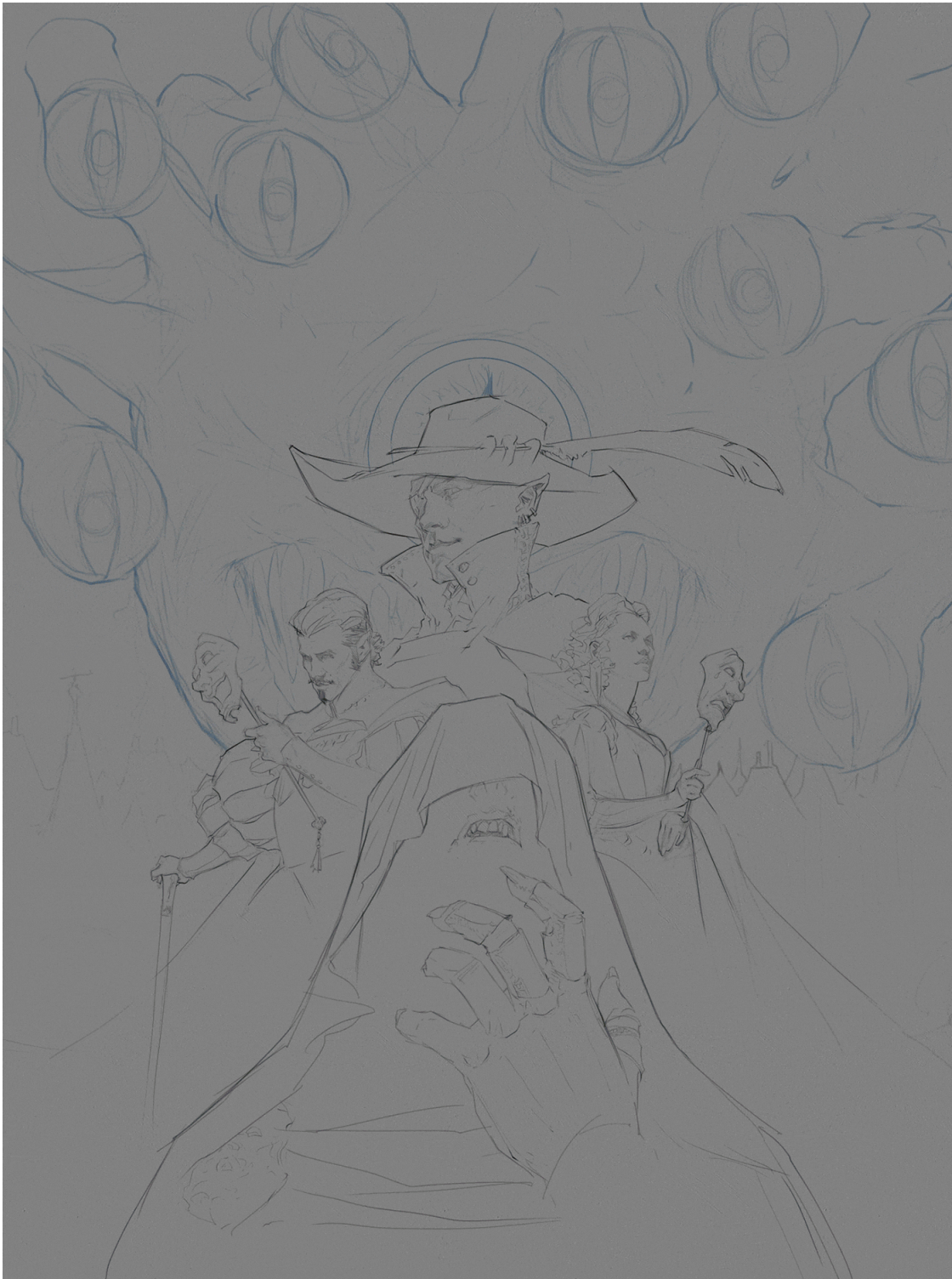


“We worked on one cover each,” explains Cynthia Sheppard. “Tyler planned out the *Dragon Heist* cover with the beholder in the background and the characters. I was able to start with that. It was like the hardest part had already been solved for me as it came pre-planned! I had my recipe and composition.”



If the movie poster style was a breakaway for D&D, it was also new for the artists themselves. Both Jacobson and Sheppard are far more used to painting story scenes and character figures than montages, which presented its own challenges.

“Things get a little trickier when you create a montage,” Jacobson admits. “You have to figure out how to separate the figures so they don’t appear as if they are in a scene, otherwise the image becomes confusing for the viewer. One way around that is to paint all the characters on a varying scale so they don’t all appear to be in the same place. You can also give each one different lighting.”



Work in progress for Waterdeep: Dragon Heist.

“Keeping things cinematic isn’t how I normally work so it was definitely a challenge to break with my style,” says Sheppard. “I had to keep all of the pieces separate but together, if that makes sense. I blocked out where things sat on *Dungeon of the Mad Mage*, composing a similar scene to Tyler’s *Dragon Heist* cover based on the different angles and shapes.

“I was given a bunch of different concept art, along with Tyler’s cover for *Dragon Heist*. So I had all the pieces to use as a starting point. I wanted them to feel related so I kept the composition but changed the color scheme. I needed *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* to feel darker and to give the reader that feeling of sinking into an evil dungeon. That’s why I went for the deep red.”

While the composition elements of *Dragon Heist* were there as a guide, Sheppard had the added challenge of taking on the style of another artist.

“Tyler and I used to do life drawing together,” she explains. “I’ve been a big fan of his for a long time and learning how he works actually really helped me when it came to designing the cover in his style, as many aspects were outside the way that I normally work. But I was able to put myself in his mind-set and create some synergy between the two covers.

“The covers had to feel like a piece of each other. I didn’t want to lose the way that I work but I wanted to bring some of the decision making from Tyler’s work into mine—the lighting, the way the planes of the face work—those sorts of things were me trying to think like Tyler.

“To put yourself into the mind of another artist is both fun and very, very hard. But it does help when you know the person. If I’d never watched Tyler paint it would have been much harder to guess what his decision-making process is and how brush strokes and colors are chosen. We’ve had a good working relationship for a long time and beyond that we’re friends. I think that’s why there’s a good camaraderie between the covers, too.”

Creating Characters

For all their connections, both covers feature a host of different characters players may encounter as they explore Faerûn’s ‘Crown of the North’ and discover the wealth of intrigue and danger above and below its streets. For Jacobson’s *Dragon Heist* cover, the tribute to Struzan continued in the hooded form of Manshoon, who occupies the prime central space.

“There’s definitely a little bit of a *Star Wars* hint with him,” smiles Jacobson. “In the initial drawing he had a horrifying face and that’s why it was hidden under the hood, but for the final cover we changed that up to a beautiful face which you can only see a small section of.

“Everyone on the cover is basically a bad guy but they all take different forms in Waterdeep. The Cassalanthers are not as obviously evil, which is why I doubled down on making them very beautiful, but they represent the money and wealth of the city. I created them bleeding gold down into the rest of the cover, as if it’s falling out of them. The main focus with them was the masks to show their deviousness and background criminal behavior.



Work in progress for Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage

“Jarlaxle is an iconic D&D character so I wanted him dead center, with Xanathar’s eye forming a halo over him. He’s a swashbuckler and the most recognizable with his big feathered hat so I wanted that focus on him visually.

“Xanathar is the in-your-face evil character. Beholders are really fun, you just have to keep count of those eye stalks! I was trying to make sure on the cover that you could see all ten but I think a few were cut

off by the end.”

Sheppard reveals that the design of her cover became much more personal than usual.

“What made composing *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* especially fun was I actually posed for a lot of the characters myself!” she laughs. “I had to liquefy my cheeks to create the githyanki, pull angry faces for Halaster Blackcloak—basically this cover involved making myself into a Halloween mask.

“I modelled all the characters in my studio for positioning and lighting, pushing and pulling to make them more fantastical. The drow female is the closest to the real me. That’s my ‘judgment face’, with different hair and pointy ears.

“Halaster was the character that I concentrated on the most. I really wanted to make him super expressive so a lot of it was about finding exactly where the line is between smiling and crazy—including nasal folds, the arch of the eyebrows and playing with the angles. It’s very important to me to get the details right until the face holds the exact expression I want.

“Everyone was based on some sort of concept art that was sent over but when creating characters I don’t typically start with a look. Instead I try to think of their traits such as their stats and flaws and what job they’re doing. A lot of it comes down to expression. For this cover it was things like making sure Halaster looked crazy enough and making sure the drow looked suitably snotty.

“It’s important to evoke what the characters are about through their facial expressions even if they look otherworldly or post-human. Even the death tyrant gets to have an expression and the placing of the center eye behind the drow’s head carried meaning. Using her head as a fake pupil means it’s staring into the viewer—I love stuff like that.

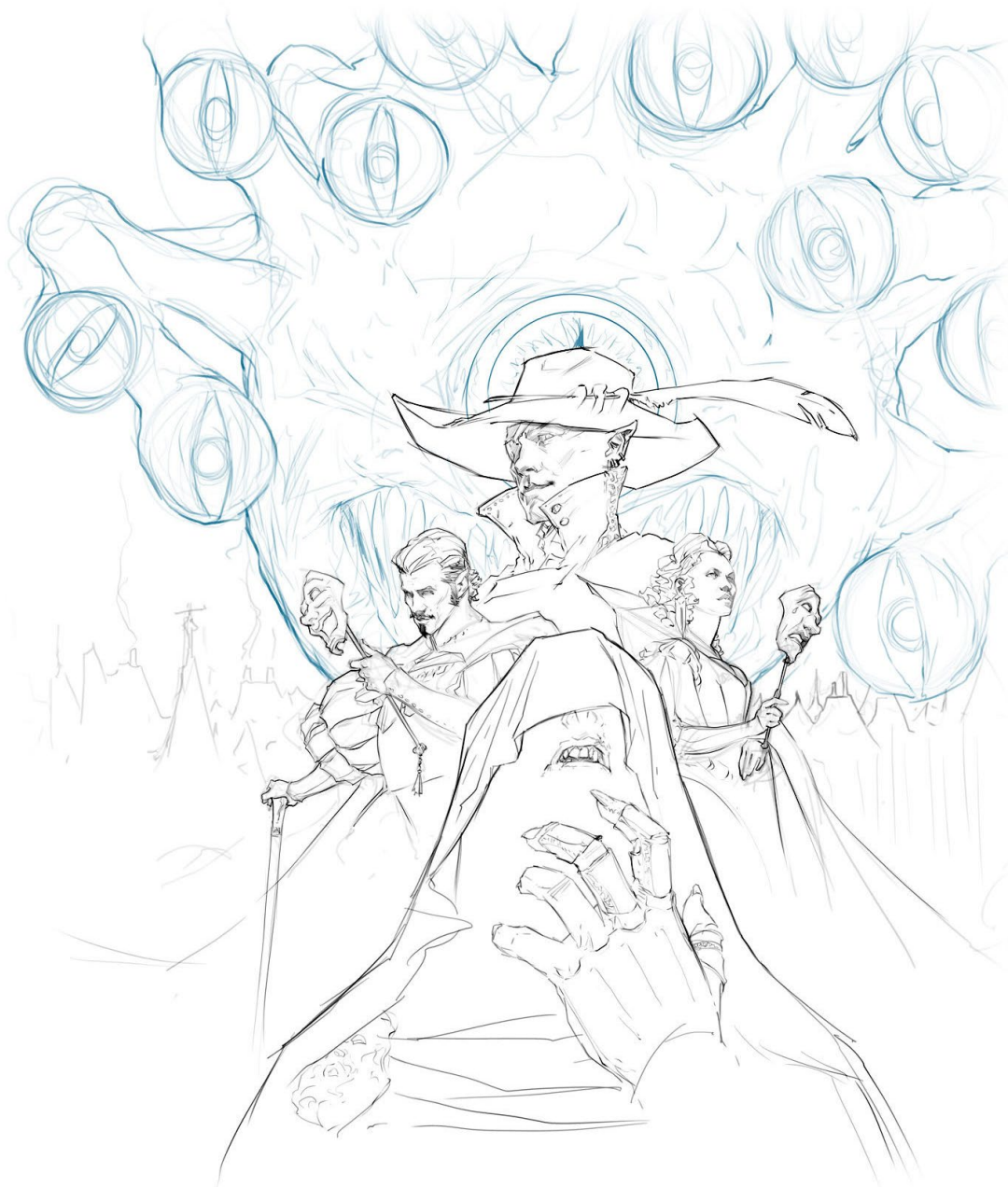
“The mind flayer and the githyanki are straight from the concept art. They’re not named but are featured there as creatures you could possibly meet when exploring the dungeon.

All about the Process

“As artistic processes go mine is pretty classic,” continues Sheppard. “I typically start with thumbnails. These are sketches to establish basic shapes or narrative composition, echoing the story that they’re going through.”

“For example, on the *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* cover I have two dragons fighting but you can’t show a lot of violence on a cover, so I had the wings intersecting. This means they cut through one another visually, not physically. It’s those little tricks I like to work out at the beginning before adding on the layers.”

“I created it digitally as all my work is digital,” adds Jacobson. “I made small adjustments to give *Dragon Heist* a textured feel, like those old movie posters that inspired the original design. But it’s something I do with all my work and I always try to push that more traditional look even though I’m painting in Photoshop.”



Sketch for Waterdeep: Dragon Heist

“My process is pretty standard too. I’ll get the brief and create a series of sketches. Then I’ll work the ones I like best up to a mid-level black-and-white composition and share them with the art director. They pick the one they like and I’ll finish that one.

“I’ll also work with the writers closely and what I do very much runs alongside the lore development. The writers are really thorough about giving you the feel of a character and any items they have, though I don’t typically go too deep into backstory. I want to hear and see what they feel like in that moment and figure out what the mood of the character is at that particular time.

“I aim for what I call the ‘cool factor’,” Jacobson explains. “Cool is king and there should be a looseness and coolness to the character or the monster. If it looks amazing I like to just go with it.”

Changing the Face of Fantasy Art

Both artists are also united by their desire to change fantasy art for the better. Given the global influence D&D enjoys, they are keen to depict fantasy characters as diverse as the players who inhabit them.

“There was already a movement when I came in three and a half years ago to ‘ban the chainmail bikini’,” recalls Sheppard.

“Sometimes, of course, it’s not about simply covering more skin, it’s about thinking on the philosophy of why a character is wearing a certain costume and where it makes sense. I feel like coming from the female perspective I can help educate people on how not to be afraid.”

“I really hate bikini armor,” agrees Jacobson. “Armor functions in a particular way and I’m very much into the practical nature of armor and weapons. It’s a big interest of mine so I don’t like impractical-looking items. All the concept art I’ve done for D&D over the years has leaned that way and I’ve been working with a lot of artists who share that aesthetic.

“I like things to look functional, but even with that fantasy layer on top they still need to have a basis in reality. I think it helps people believe more in the world they’re inhabiting if it is anchored in the functional world. That’s why we also discuss representing more people when we create characters.

“I like to think about how a particular class and character would equip themselves. To me a magic user isn’t going to wear a lot of gear because they rely on their magic abilities but a fighter is going to have a lot more.”

“It’s definitely all about the character,” agrees Sheppard. “What they’d wear, and what the shapes made by the clothing say about them.”

Finishing Touches

For Jacobson, taking the cover art for *Dragon Heist* and *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* in a new artistic direction was a creative achievement both for himself and for Wizards of the Coast.

“My favorite thing about these covers is that I was able to achieve that movie-poster look,” he says. “I think it is so appropriate for that campaign. It’s very different from my normal work but I’m really pleased with how it turned out and that they just look so great lined up together.”

“It always helps to have a new opinion on things,” agrees Sheppard. “I would say that to be an artist here at Wizards it helps to have a lot of weird experiences and a new take on things. But that’s why I love it.”

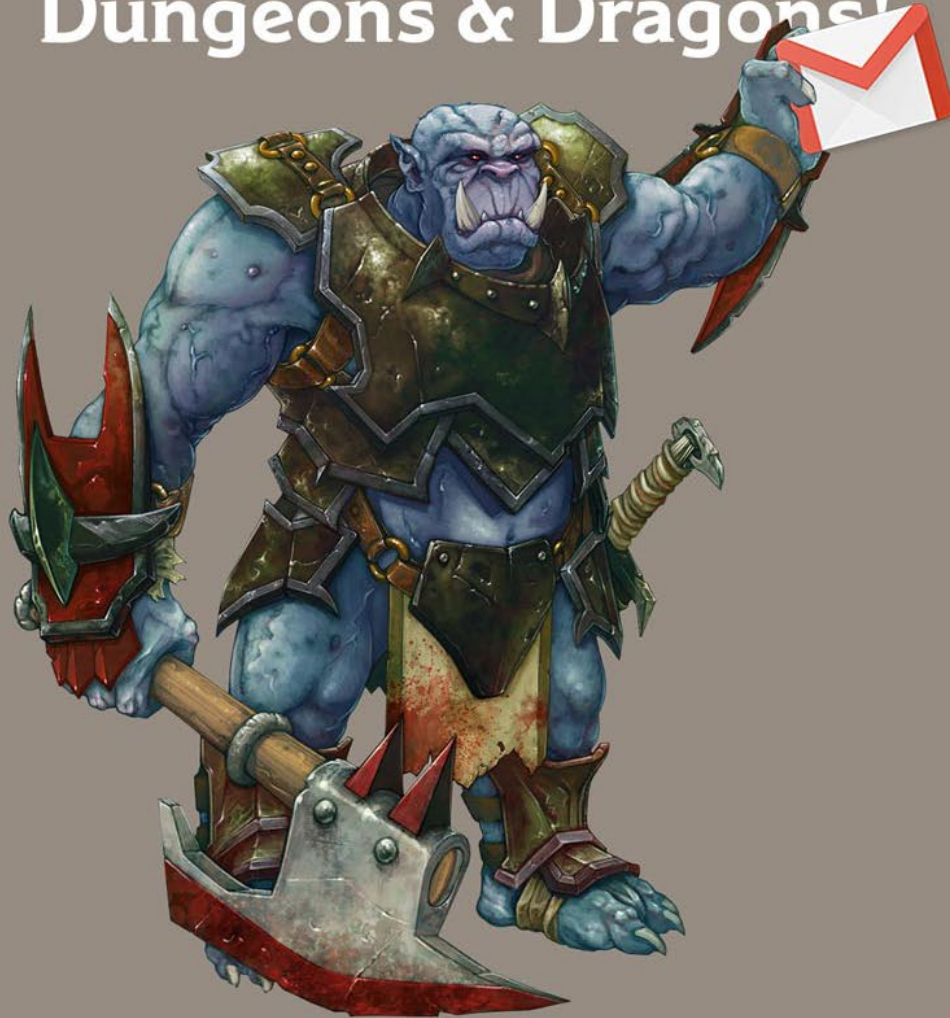
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[More on Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage](#)

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Magic Cards

Pick a card, any card. That's your new magic item! Chris Tulach and Kat Kruger discuss how to successfully combine *Magic: The Gathering* and *D&D*

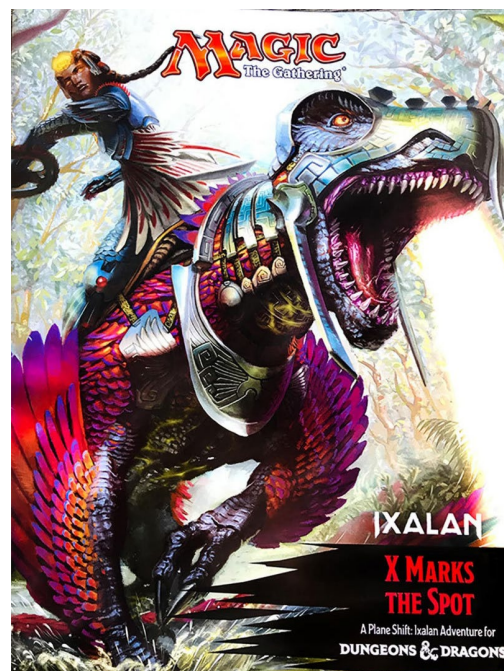
Mashing up *Magic: The Gathering* and *D&D* isn't the kind of happy accident that creates a **chocolate chip cookie** (or possibly an owlbear). It's a deliberate bringing together of two

systems and worlds that was always meant to be.

“The identities of *Magic* and D&D are both ensconced firmly in the heroic fantasy space so they naturally fit each other well,” says Chris Tulach, Program Manager at Wizards of the Coast. “The depth of the creative for the *Magic* worlds we’ve visited is a gold mine for D&D players and DMs.

“There’s plenty of inspiration through the story, setting, art, and flavor text on the cards. That said, there’s also plenty of room for a Dungeon Master to get creative since there’s a lot of definition left out of subjects that a DM might want to use in their D&D game. For example, if a *Magic* setting doesn’t have a map available for reference the DM can make one to use as they see fit.”

Working alongside designer Kat Kruger, Tulach created a *Plane Shift: Ixalan* adventure for last year’s Extra Life charity event. One of its brilliant features was an appendix of magic items named “Hidden Plunder”. This allowed DMs to collect the corresponding *Magic: The Gathering* cards from the *Ixalan* set and have players draw from that deck when they find a treasure. It’s a mechanic that may be replicated in an adventure given away free as part of Extra Life in 2018.



(Select to view)

“Thinking about using *Magic* cards as an accessory during D&D play goes back to before we even had James Wyatt’s excellent *Plane Shift* series of supplements,” Tulach remembers. “When the first *Innistrad* set came out about seven years ago, I was at a convention with my friend Jerry LeNeave. We were talking about how great the setting was and how it would either make a cool D&D setting on its own, or the cards from it would be a great resource to use in a *Ravenloft* game. That conversation never really left my head and when Kat Kruger and I started writing our first crossover adventure I knew we had to use

cards in some way.”

Inspiration not Perspiration

Kruger also found the cards a unique source of inspiration when it came to writing *X Marks the Spot*, soaking up their combination of art, mechanics and flavor text.

“Often I’d either be drawn to a card for the art or its name and then the flavor text would spark an idea. The best example of that is *Arguel’s Blood Fast* which transforms into the *Temple of Aclazotz* as this card informed the lore around the quest item and its location in the adventure,” she recalls.

“Something about the image and flavor text really spoke to me and provided an end-goal. It reads: ‘Arguel’s vision led him into the jungles of Ixalan... to the lost temple of a bat-god of night, eternal enemy to the Threefold Sun.’ Everything else fell into place based on that. I was able to draw inspiration for the quest item, an NPC, and the final boss battle.”





(Select to view)

“My first step was to go through all the cards in the set and look for ones that I thought would work well as locations, NPCs, and creatures for a D&D adventure. Chris and I went in with the idea that a prison escape and treasure hunt would be the overarching storyline so that helped in choosing the cards. Every so often as the writing progressed I’d look back through cards for further inspiration or details from the plane.”

The addition of cards DMs could actually offer their players brought the two worlds together even more closely. Tulach chose magic items that were reasonable for an adventurer to carry and gave them D&D abilities to reflect their mechanics in *Magic*. Happily he says he know groups of gamers who tracked down the six cards—which all come from recent sets and are easily obtainable—to be able to offer the physical items in-game to their players.



(Select to view)

“Groups that used it found it helps with visualization since the art immerses you in the game,” he says. “You can also draw cards randomly instead of rolling for an item, which has a visceral element to it. I haven’t received any negative feedback and since it’s entirely optional I think it’s a fun way to create engagement in the adventure.”

Tulach also took the lead on character creation in the collaboration and brought the Atzocan Archer Artinoq to life (as a beast master ranger in D&D). What made him a little more lighthearted was the inclusion of his *Raptor Companion*.



(Select to view)

“Artinoq’s companion is a raptor named Sharkbait! The flavor text on the *Raptor Companion* card reads, ‘A raptor will follow any order as long as that order is ‘hunt,’ ‘kill,’ or ‘go for the guts.’” It’s terrifying but as a side note we had met a dachshund named Sharkbait before co-writing the adventure so I also found it pretty humorous.”

Please Note: Magic Extra Life livestreaming takes place October 19-20; the Extra Life adventure being run on October 20 (and in stores for Ravnica Weekend) will be Krenko’s Way, which appears in the Guildmasters’ Guide to Ravnica and does not use Magic cards. However, the bonus adventure being given away to Extra Life

participants after the events conclude may include Magic card integration.

Interested in further Extra Life events? D&D Extra Life will be livestreaming games November 3 (during the official Extra Life Game Day), as well throughout the following week leading into Gamehole Con, November 8-11 in Madison WI. You can find out more, including a full schedule and ways to take part yourself, at the [D&D Extra Life website](#).

Further Ideas

For more details on implementing *Magic: The Gathering* into your D&D game, you might look back at a past Behind the Screens article. In our [Unconventional Challenge](#), we looked at using *Magic* cards as scrolls, real world locations for fantasy maps, and a host of other options.

In addition, aFistfulofDice created the following *DM Forge: D&D Tips & Tricks* video, showcasing ways to break open any random *Magic* booster pack and use the cards within to prep for your next D&D game.

X Marks the Spot

The prison-escape scenario in this *Plane Shift: Ixalan* adventure sees

an unlikely group of heroes brave the unknown in a race to reach an ancient relic before the enemy does. *X Marks the Spot* includes pre-generated 4th-level characters from the world of Ixalan: cleric; ranger; sorcerer; fighter; rogue; and druid.

It is available to download for free from the DMs Guild using the link below. Plus, if you would like to donate to the D&D Extra Life fundraising total, [click here](#). Play games, heal kids!

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MAGIC

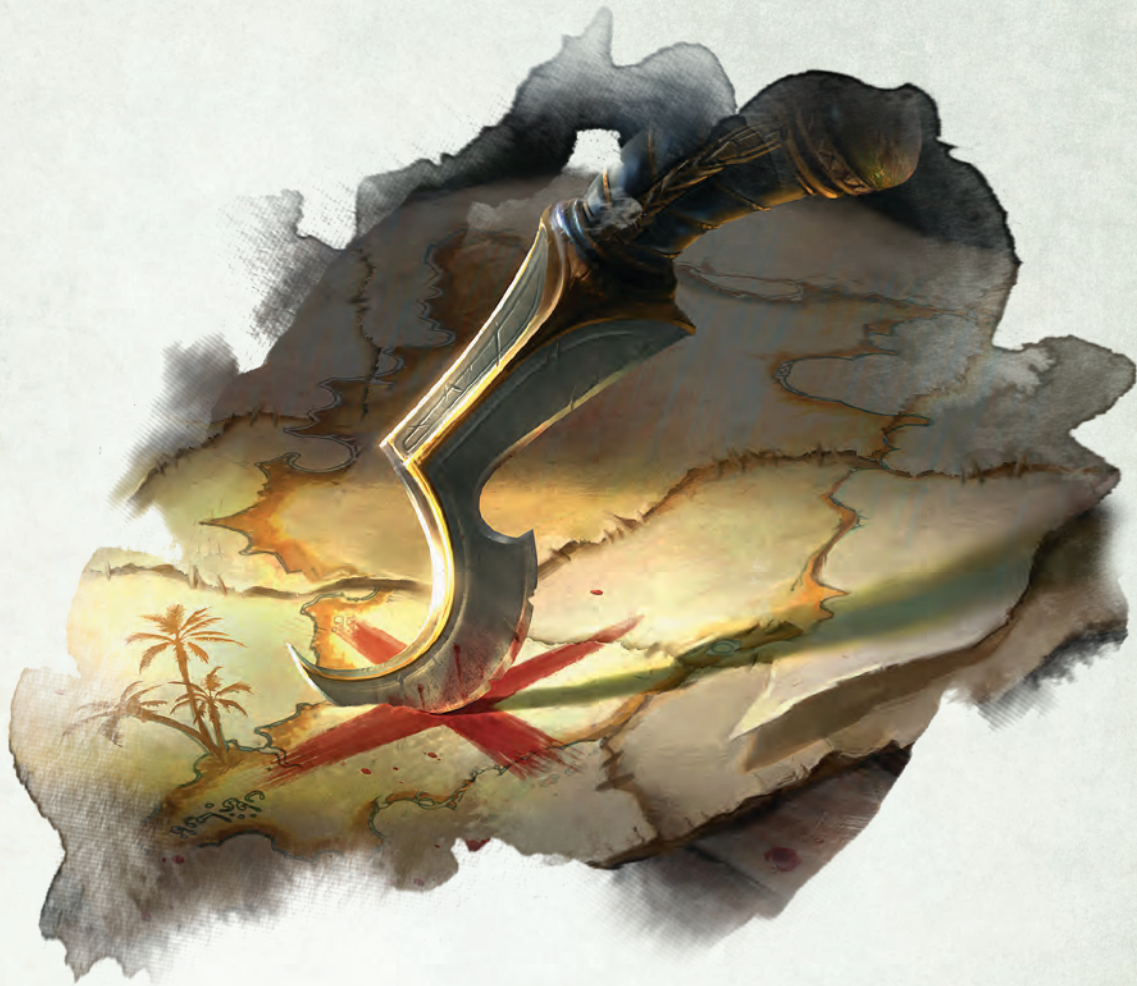
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IXALAN

**X MARKS
THE SPOT**

A Plane Shift: Ixalan Adventure for
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®

X MARKS THE SPOT



A prison escape for an unlikely group of heroes turns into a race for an ancient relic sought by the Legion of Dusk. Can you brave the unknown and capture the treasure before the enemy does? This D&D adventure is set on the plane of Ixalan, and uses 4th-level pregenerated characters.

A PLANE SHIFT: IXALAN ADVENTURE FOR DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

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BACKGROUND

Ixalan is a land of exploration and discovery. But the Legion of Dusk—a vampire society that formed from an alliance of nobles and the church—has recently arrived from overseas to expand its territories. The legion's army seeks to conquer the island, and the vampires have erected numerous forts in the south. However, their plans have been met with resistance from the inhabitants of Ixalan.

The Sun Empire rules the coast, and has managed to tame dinosaurs enough to work alongside them. Meanwhile, the River Heralds—a loose society of nomadic merfolk tribes—move throughout the interior of Ixalan, at one with nature. These two groups have long held an uneasy accord.

At sea, forces of the piratical Brazen Coalition harry the naval forces of the Legion of Dusk, which make landfall to plunder the bounty of Ixalan as they see fit. But even so, not all vampires view the current ruling establishment as the final authority. The Order of the Five Sacraments, a vampire church sect that believes in establishing a trade relationship with the Sun Empire, hopes to undermine the plans of the would-be conquerors.

OVERVIEW

The Legion of Dusk is ruled by rituals that require its members to feed only from the blood of their foes. As such, the legion fortification known as Conqueror's Foothold houses prisoners—enemies of the state and others deemed ne'er-do-wells—who are slaughtered once every full moon.

At the start of the adventure, the characters find themselves imprisoned at Conqueror's Foothold and scheduled to be executed to feed their captors. Alante, a vampire cleric who administers last rites at the fort, aids them in a prison escape. She belongs to the Order of the Five Sacraments, and has been charged with opposing the aims of the Legion of Dusk.

Conqueror's Foothold is overseen by Vona, known as the Butcher of Magan. Vona has uncovered a map of the local region that shows the location of a powerful artifact known as the *Hierophant's Chalice*, hidden in the south of Ixalan at the Temple of Aclazotz. The *Hierophant's Chalice* is rumored to be able to create an endless supply of blood, making it potentially valuable to the vampires of the Legion of Dusk. A prophet named Arguel is rumored to have brought the chalice to the temple for unknown reasons, and Vona wishes to secure it.

In exchange for various favors—in addition to escaping from certain death—the adventurers have agreed to help Alante find the artifact first. Journeying across the island from Conqueror's Foothold to the Temple of Aclazotz takes several days, and brings the characters through dangerous territory and various random encounters.

As they seek the chalice, the characters meet a mad apostle who can lead them to it. At the lost temple that is the chalice's hiding place, the adventurers must face off against the demonic spawn of a bat-god. They are then able to wrest the chalice from the desiccated body of the prophet, who was led to the temple by the demon.



ADVENTURE HOOKS

The characters are on a mission for the Order of the Five Sacraments to retrieve the *Hierophant's Chalice* from the Temple of Aclazotz, deep in the uncharted forests of Ixalan. In addition to the bargains they have struck with the church, each character has been offered 100 gp to retrieve the sacred item and bring it to a rendezvous point south of the island stronghold of Fort Durrion.

The backgrounds provided on the character sheets also provide motivations for the characters to come together as a party.

Alante hopes to gain favor with the Order of the Five Sacraments, a sect of the church that believes in establishing a trade relationship with the Sun Empire.

Velisha yearns to expel the unnatural force that is rumored to reside in the Temple of Aclazotz.

Rouxil wants to bring an end to the conflict in this region of Ixalan by ensuring the Order of the Five Sacraments rises to power.

Artinoq desires peace and is eager to show his father that he is a worthy leader.

Turk Two Coins desires to claim a share of a great treasure, so that he can live out the rest of his life in debauchery.

Ellie Redcap wants nothing more than to captain her own ship—by whatever means necessary.

TREASURE

This adventure uses *Magic: The Gathering* cards to help build momentum toward adventure progression, and to reward interactive play.

You'll need a handful of Treasure token cards (found in Ixalan booster packs) and a number of cards detailing treasures from the Ixalan set. See "Appendix D: Hidden Plunder" at the end of this adventure for the card list, then shuffle those nontoken cards to make an item deck.

Whenever a player advances an objective, makes an important discovery, or has a good idea, give that player a Treasure token. A player cannot have more than one Treasure token for his or her character. Random encounters then provide an opportunity to uncover a treasure cache. When searching an area, players roll against each other to find treasure, allowing one player to redeem a Treasure token and draw from the item deck.

STARTING THE ADVENTURE

Once the players have chosen characters, you are ready to begin. Read the following text to set up the scenario and the bargain the characters have made for their freedom.

Your time in the prison cells of Conqueror's Foothold is drawing to an end—as are your lives. Like all those deemed enemies of the Legion of Dusk, you are set to be executed to feed the vampires who command the fortress. On the night before the full moon, you have been moved to the executioner's chamber, next in line to be sacrificed.

But what your captors don't know is that each of you has made a bargain with the cleric, Alante. In exchange for your lives and retrieval of the legendary relic known as the *Hierophant's Chalice*, you have been promised various favors from the Order of the Five Sacraments—a vampiric sect that opposes the Legion of Dusk's thirst for conquest. During your brief time in Conqueror's Foothold, Alante has been able to communicate a plan of escape by sending *message* spells at various interludes. Tonight marks the night that plan comes to fruition.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

Read the following to set up the characters' escape from the forces of the Legion of Dusk:

You stand in a large holding cell awaiting the executioner's summons. Outside the cell window, a nearly full moon hangs high in the cloudless sky. In the center of the executioner's chamber, a greataxe lies across a stone block. Chains lined with butcher hooks hang above metal vats stacked and waiting to collect the blood of the executed, and reminding you of your imminent appointment with death.

The guards open the metal grate that seals your cell. Stepping into the chamber beyond, you see the cleric who will oversee your sacrifice. That's your cue. It's time to issue last rites . . . to the guards.

The characters have no gear, except for Alante. They are unarmored and can make only unarmed strikes, dealing bludgeoning damage equal to 1 + Strength modifier.

The Legion of Dusk troops stationed at Conqueror's Foothold are loyal to Vona, Butcher of Magan. Two human **guards** have escorted the cleric Alante into the cell. One guard carries a set of keys that can be used to open the prison cells, the main door, and the executioner's hatch (see below). The perimeter of the room is lined

EXPLORING IXALAN

Traveling from Conqueror's Foothold to the Temple of Aclazotz takes three days by way of the beach or four days through the mountains. While moving through certain terrain (Fort Leor and Fort Durrion, Primal Wellspring, and Uncharted Territory), random encounters might be triggered. Roll a d20 to check for an encounter once during the day and once during the night. If the result is 18 or higher by day, or 15 or higher at night, a random encounter occurs. Refer to the encounter tables in each region to determine what the adventurers meet, and reroll if the result doesn't make sense given the circumstances.

with five other cell blocks, each large enough to hold five prisoners but empty at present.

Only one door leads out of the executioner's chamber. Alante, Turk, and Ellie know that no prisoner has ever successfully escaped from Conqueror's Foothold, and that to go through that door means a vicious fight against dozens of guards, and no guarantee of finding an exit.

The Executioner's Hatch. In one corner of the chamber, a padlocked lever stands next to a three-foot-square metal grate. If the lever is unlocked (either with the key carried by the guard or a successful DC 20 Dexterity check using thieves' tools), it can be pulled to drop the grate open. This reveals the executioner's hatch—a chute down which bodies are dumped into the ocean after they are drained of life by the vampires in the fort.

A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check notes that the slick walls of the chute offer no handholds. This makes it a straight drop into the ocean, and prevents anyone from getting back up this way. Characters who jump through the hatch take no damage when they hit the water, and can then easily swim to shore.

One hour after the characters escape, a new group of guards enters the executioner's block and sounds an alert (see "Conqueror's Foothold," below).

Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check notices a **hunter shark** in the water. Any party member who takes damage during the fight with the guards attracts its attention and causes the shark to attack.

CONQUEROR'S FOOTHOLD

When the characters reach the beach in the shadow of the fortress, read:

The bastioned fortification of Conqueror's Foothold towers high above the sheer cliff side. Waves crash along the rocky shoreline, their caps lit by moonlight.

Artinoq's raptor companion, Sharkbait, waits on the beach with a rucksack containing ten days' rations. Once he sees his companion, he leads the party to a hidden cache buried in the sand, which contains all their confiscated gear. Alante managed to smuggle it out of the fortress a few days ago.



To the north, a trail leads to the Field of Ruin. Following this path through to the northwest mountain passage will take the characters through the Primal Wellspring region, bypassing the strongholds of the Legion of Dusk.

Those strongholds—Fort Leor and Fort Durrion—lie to the west. A well-used path makes travel along that route easier, but the area is often patrolled by soldiers of the Legion of Dusk.

Regardless of which route the characters take, they must venture through Unclaimed Territory before making their way to the Temple of Aclazotz.

Discovery and Pursuit. One hour after the characters fought the guards, another patrol enters the executioner's chamber and discovers the escape. A bell-toll alarm sounds out within the fort, and a patrol of twelve **guards** is sent out to comb the area for the prisoners and the duplicitous Alante. Additionally, beacon towers between Conqueror's Foothold, Fort Leor, and Fort Durrion light up, making it difficult for characters who are not with the Legion of Dusk to move along the beach unseen. Any Dexterity (Stealth) checks made by the characters to avoid guards are made with disadvantage.

Two hours after the escape, Vona discovers that Alante is attempting to claim the *Hierophant's Chalice* before he does. The Butcher of Magan assembles a force and sends them out to find the relic first. Vona's relic hunters are comprised of two vampire soldiers (use **guard** statistics), a human cleric (use **priest** statistics), and a human **scout**, all on horseback. They take the most direct route to the Temple of Aclazotz, past Fort Leor and Fort Durrion across the beach. However, they subsequently become lost in the Unclaimed Territory, and can be randomly encountered there.

Danger on the Beach. If the characters continue along the shoreline, they come upon the wreckage of numerous ships. Among the dead is the orc Captain Beelzebubo from the pirate ship *Relentless*, on which both Ellie and Turk served. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check notes that the orc appears to have died from stab wounds rather than by drowning.

Any character surveilling the area closely with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check notices movement in the waves.

Rising from the surf, skeletons dressed in the tattered clothes of pirates shamble toward the shore!

The six **skeletons** attack, gaining surprise if all the characters failed to notice them.

FIELD OF RUIN

It takes four hours to reach this area from Conqueror's Foothold.

Dozens upon dozens of bodies are strewn about the field in various states of decomposition. The ruined banners of fallen war parties billow in the sea breeze.

The characters can follow a river north to a mountain passage through the Primal Wellspring. To the south is the shoreline. Fort Leor and Fort Durrion are to the west, within sight of the beach.

A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals the presence of scavengers in the field. Three medium raptors (use **deinonychus** statistics) feast on corpses to the west. If the characters notice the raptors, they can attempt a group Stealth check against the creatures' passive Wisdom (Perception) of 13. On a failed group check, or if the characters don't notice the raptors, the raptors spot the party and attack.

Random Encounters. If the party travels along the shore near the forts, use the following table if a random encounter is rolled.

SHORELINE ENCOUNTERS

1d6	Encounter
1	A 20-foot-deep hidden pit trap is noticed only with a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. The trap fires a flare when triggered, summoning a nearby patrol of 2d6 guards to investigate.
2	1d6 trilobites (use giant crab statistics)
3	A worn jade totem is etched with a warning in Aquan: <i>“No good will come from what you seek. Turn back now or suffer an ignoble death far from your home.”</i>
4	An area of quicksand cannot be detected until one or more characters steps within it. The quicksand is 10 feet deep, and any creature that steps into it sinks 1d4 + 1 feet, then sinks 1d4 feet at the start of each of its turns. A successful Strength check (DC 10 + the number of feet sunk) allows a character to escape the quicksand. A rope thrown by any ally to the struggling character grants advantage on the check. Any creature completely submerged begins to suffocate.
5	2d4 raptors (use velociraptor statistics)
6	The characters discover a treasure cache. All characters with a Treasure token card have a contest of Wisdom (Perception), with the character with the highest check trading the token for a card from the item deck.

If the party travels through the interior to avoid the forts, use the following table if a random encounter is rolled.

INTERIOR ENCOUNTERS

1d4	Encounter
1	2d6 skittering heartstoppers (use giant centipede statistics)
2	The characters discover a treasure cache. All characters with a Treasure token card have a contest of Wisdom (Perception), with the character with the highest check trading the token for a card from the item deck.
3	1d4 aerosaurs (use quetzalcoatlus statistics)
4	1d4 ferocidons (use allosaurus statistics)

FORT LEOR AND FORT DURRON

A simple structure surrounded by a wooden palisade, Fort Leor is the nearest fortress to Conqueror’s Foothold. It takes one day of travel for the characters to arrive here.

Fort Leor stands in the middle of the beach, alongside a river that winds down from the northern mountains to empty into the ocean. Surrounded by a wooden palisade, armed patrols march along the fort’s parapet walls.

Fort Durrion, near the Temple of Aclazotz, is a stronghold isolated on an island and home to the armada of the Legion of Dusk. It takes one day to travel here from Fort Leor.

Fort Durrion rises tall on an island to the south. Another bastioned fortress, not unlike Conqueror’s Foothold, its looming presence in the distance is made even more ominous by the Dusk Legion dreadnought moored at its stone pier.

Avoiding Notice. The characters must pass near each fort. They can use magic or attempt a group Dexterity (Stealth) check (DC 15 to succeed during the day, DC 10 to succeed at night) to travel unseen. At either fort, if the characters are spotted, a patrol of twelve **guards** mounted on **riding horses** moves to intercept. The guards ask the characters their reasons for traveling through the area, and if not convinced by their story, move to attack and apprehend them.

PRIMAL WELLSPRING

It takes two days to reach this area from the Field of Ruin.

Following the natural path up through mountainous terrain, you eventually make your way down again, moving through a lush canopy of vines into a vivid jungle. Ahead of you, a waterfall erupts from a great stone sculpture jutting out from the side of a cliff, sourced by a powerful spring.





The area around the waterfall spring is covered in thick foliage and tangles of vines, making it difficult terrain. Because there is no natural path through this region, the party's navigator must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to find the way through to the next region. If the party is moving at a slow pace, the navigator gains a +5 bonus to the check, while a fast pace imposes a -5 penalty. The party's navigator can repeat the check after the party spends 1d6 hours trying to get back on course.

Lurking Threat. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception or Survival) check notes movement beneath the water's surface, masked by the splash of the waterfall. The Primal Wellspring is home to a snapping sailback (use **giant crocodile** statistics).

Disturbing the spring in any manner results in attracting the attention of the creature, which attacks immediately.

The gaping maw of an enormous beast surfaces from the pool, its giant red fin sluicing water across the shore.

UNCLAIMED TERRITORY

It takes one day to reach this area from Fort Durrion or the Primal Wellspring.

The mist of the mountains clears to reveal a rainforest. The tall trees and foliage around you are alive with movement, and macaws and parrots sing a cacophonous tune.

An Unlikely Ally. Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check while moving within the Unclaimed Territory determines that the party is being followed. In response to being spotted (or at any opportune moment), a vampire cleric named Mavren reveals himself to the characters (use **cult fanatic** statistics).

By all outward appearances, Mavren has gone mad. A tall figure with dark hair, sunken eyes, and pallid skin, he is an apostle of the prophet Arguel, and wears the tattered robes of the clergy of the Legion of Dusk. But unknown to the characters, Mavren is secretly under the control of a demon named Zotz—the spawn of a dread bat-god.

Mavren knows the following information, which he shares in the course of any conversation with the characters:

- The prophet Arguel had a vision that led him into the jungles of Ixalan with the Hierophant's Chalice.
- The Temple of Aclazotz is hidden in the nearby jungle, four hours away.
- A murderous creature lurks around the temple, known to Mavren as "the night horror."

TEMPLE OF ACLAZOTZ

Nearly hidden by the jungle, a stone temple is overgrown with vines. Its broad steps lead up to a darkened entrance, and are caked with a red-black substance. Absolute silence hangs in the area around the temple, as though the site is devoid of life.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals the substance on the steps to be blood. It is impossible to determine how many bodies have been dragged into the temple.

The Night Horror. If Mavren led the adventurers here, he urges them to enter quickly, before they wake the creature that lurks in the area.

The characters must succeed on a DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to pass undetected by this **ch-upacabra**, which attacks if it senses any intrusion into its territory. Mavren abandons the party and retreats into the temple if the characters are attacked.

Arguel's End. The interior of the temple is a single chamber with a ceiling thirty feet high. It is unlit, and characters must use light or have darkvision to explore.

The trail from the steps leads into a stone chamber. A strong stench fills the air and the temperature is significantly cooler here than it was outside in the humidity of the rainforest. In the center of the chamber stands a lone altar, upon which lies a corpse.

Characters who move within ten feet of the altar note that the corpse is little more than a desiccated husk. It wears the robes of a marshal from the Legion of Dusk and holds an ornate silver goblet in its hands.

Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check determines that Mavren believes he's working for some higher purpose, but that he is also hiding something. If a character succeeds on a DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check after pressing Mavren, the cleric reveals through his ravings that the Temple of Aclazotz is the home of his demonic master.

Mavren can lead the party directly to the Temple of Aclazotz. If the characters decline his aid, the party's navigator must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check to find the way to the temple. If the party is moving at a slow pace, the navigator gains a +5 bonus to the check, while a fast pace imposes a -5 penalty. The party's navigator can repeat the check after the party spends 1d6 hours trying to get back on course.

Random Encounters. As the party travels through the Unclaimed Territory, use the following table if a random encounter is rolled.

UNCLAIMED TERRITORY ENCOUNTERS

1d6	Encounter
1	2d4 frilled deathspitters
2	1 dryad and 1d12 awakened shrubs
3	Vona's relic hunters: 2 vampire soldiers (guards), 1 human cleric (priest), 1 human scout
4	The characters discover a treasure cache. All characters with a Treasure token card have a contest of Wisdom (Perception), with the character with the highest check trading the token for a card from the item deck.
5	1 griffon
6	1 wildgrowth walker (use earth elemental statistics)





Any character who succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check recognizes the remains as those of Arguel, the prophet rumored to have brought the *Hierophant's Chalice* to the temple—and that it is the actual chalice he holds in his hands. A source of endless blood, the chalice activates when a single drop of blood is placed within it, filling to the brim with sanguineous fluid.

Demonic Guardians. Hanging from the ceiling above the altar are four blight keepers (use **giant bat** statistics) and a demon named Zotz (use **vrock** statistics). If Mavren fled from the chupacabra attack, he alerts Zotz, his demonic master, of the party's presence outside. Otherwise, if the characters arrive by day, they find the creatures sleeping and can surprise them if they attack at once and make no loud noise. At night, the characters must succeed on a DC 10 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to enter the temple undetected and get the drop on the demon and its minions.

The spawn of a forgotten bat-god, the demon Zotz means to spread plague and corruption across Ixalan. He has long used his influence upon the insane

Mavren to bring prey to the temple. Seeing how the *Hierophant's Chalice* could be used as a means to broker peace between the Legion of Dusk and the local inhabitants by reducing the need for blood sacrifices, Zotz protects the item and attempts to corrupt it with his demonic essence.

Mavren aids his master in combat. If he survives after Zotz is defeated, the cleric is no longer under the sway of the demon, but he remembers and is haunted by all the horrible things he's done in Zotz's name.

CONCLUSION

After retrieving the *Hierophant's Chalice* from the Temple of Aclazotz, the characters can make their way to a rendezvous point south of Fort Durrion, previously arranged by Alante. They are met by two emissaries from the Order of the Five Sacraments, who fulfill the terms of the various agreements made with the party members.

APPENDIX A: MONSTER AND NPC STATISTICS

ALLOSAURUS

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 51 (6d10 + 18)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	13 (+1)	17 (+3)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Pounce. If the allosaurus moves at least 30 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the allosaurus can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage.

AWAKENED SHRUB

Small plant, unaligned

Armor Class 9

Hit Points 10 (3d6)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (-4)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	6 (-2)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances piercing

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages one language known by its creator

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

False Appearance. While the shrub remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal shrub.

ACTIONS

Rake. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 1 (1d4 - 1) slashing damage.

An **awakened shrub** is an ordinary shrub given sentience and mobility by the *awaken* spell or similar magic.

CHUPACABRA

Medium monstrosity, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	6 (-2)	13 (+1)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +4

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Senses dark vision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the chupacabra has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.
Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Drain Blood. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature that is prone, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken, and the chupacabra regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0.

REACTIONS

Pin. If a creature within 5 feet of the chupacabra stands up, the chupacabra can use its reaction to make a bite attack.

CULT FANATIC

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Persuasion +4, Religion +2

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dark Devotion. The fanatic has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Spellcasting. The fanatic is a 4th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). The fanatic has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light*, *sacred flame*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *inflict wounds*, *shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *hold person*, *spiritual weapon*

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The fanatic makes two melee attacks.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

DEINONYCHUS

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 26 (4d8 + 8)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Pounce. If the deinonychus moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the deinonychus can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The deinonychus makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

DRYAD

Medium fey, neutral

Armor Class 11 (16 with *barkskin*)

Hit Points 22 (5d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Elvish, Sylvan

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The dryad's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 14). The dryad can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *druidcraft*

3/day each: *entangle*, *goodberry*

1/day each: *barkskin*, *pass without trace*, *shillelagh*

Magic Resistance. The dryad has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Speak with Beasts and Plants. The dryad can communicate with beasts and plants as if they shared a language.

Tree Stride. Once on her turn, the dryad can use 10 feet of her movement to step magically into one living tree within her reach and emerge from a second living tree within 60 feet of the first tree, appearing in an unoccupied space within 5 feet of the second tree. Both trees must be Large or bigger.

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit (+6 to hit with *shillelagh*), reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage with *shillelagh*.

Fey Charm. The dryad targets one humanoid or beast that she can see within 30 feet of her. If the target can see the dryad, it must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or be magically charmed. The charmed creature regards the dryad as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under the dryad's control, it takes the dryad's requests or actions in the most favorable way it can.

Each time the dryad or its allies do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until the dryad dies, is on a different plane of existence from the target, or ends the effect as a bonus action. If a target's saving throw is successful, the target is immune to the dryad's Fey Charm for the next 24 hours.

The dryad can have no more than one humanoid and up to three beasts charmed at a time.

EARTH ELEMENTAL

Large elemental, neutral

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 126 (12d10 + 60)

Speed 30 ft., burrow 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	8 (-1)	20 (+5)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities thunder

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., tremorsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Terran

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Earth Glide. The elemental can burrow through nonmagical, unworked earth and stone. While doing so, the elemental doesn't disturb the material it moves through.

Siege Monster. The elemental deals double damage to objects and structures.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The elemental makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

FRILLED DEATHSPITTER

Small beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 18 (4d6 + 4)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The deathspitter makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Spit Poison. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 15/30 ft., one creature. *Hit:* The target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. In addition, a creature that fails its saving throw is blinded until the end of the deathspitter's next turn.

GIANT BAT

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 22 (4d10)

Speed 10 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	2 (-4)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Senses blindsight 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Echolocation. The bat can't use its blindsight while deafened.

Keen Hearing. The bat has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

GIANT CENTIPEDE

Small beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 4 (1d6 + 1)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
5 (-3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	1 (-5)	7 (-2)	3 (-4)

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 8

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or take 10 (3d6) poison damage. If the poison damage reduces the target to 0 hit points, the target is stable but poisoned for 1 hour, even after regaining hit points, and is paralyzed while poisoned in this way.

GIANT CRAB

Medium beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	15 (+2)	11 (+0)	1 (-5)	9 (-1)	3 (-4)

Skills Stealth +4

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Amphibious. The crab can breathe air and water.

ACTIONS

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 11). The crab has two claws, each of which can grapple only one target.

GIANT CROCODILE

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 85 (9d12 + 27)

Speed 30 ft., swim 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	9 (-1)	17 (+3)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	7 (-2)

Skills Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Hold Breath. The crocodile can hold its breath for 30 minutes.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The crocodile makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its tail.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 21 (3d10 + 5) piercing damage, and the target is grappled (escape DC 16). Until this grapple ends, the target is restrained, and the crocodile can't bite another target.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target not grappled by the crocodile. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

GRIFFON

Large monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 59 (7d10 + 21)

Speed 30 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	2 (-4)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Skills Perception +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Keen Sight. The griffon has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The griffon makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its claws.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

GUARD

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage, or 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

HUNTER SHARK

Large beast, unaligned

Armor Class 12 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d10 + 12)

Speed 0 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	1 (-5)	10 (+0)	4 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Senses blindsight 30 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Blood Frenzy. The shark has advantage on melee attack rolls against any creature that doesn't have all its hit points.

Water Breathing. The shark can breathe only underwater.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

PRIEST

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 13 (chain shirt)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	13 (+1)

Skills Medicine +7, Persuasion +3, Religion +4

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages any two languages

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Divine Eminence. As a bonus action, the priest can expend a spell slot to cause its melee weapon attacks to magically deal an extra 10 (3d6) radiant damage to a target on a hit. This benefit lasts until the end of the turn. If the priest expends a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the extra damage increases by 1d6 for each level above 1st.

Spellcasting. The priest is a 5th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). The priest has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, guiding bolt, sanctuary*
2nd level (3 slots): *lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*
3rd level (2 slots): *dispel magic, spirit guardians*

ACTIONS

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage.

QUETZALCOATLUS

Huge beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 30 (4d12 + 4)

Speed 10 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	13 (+1)	13 (+1)	2 (-4)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Dive Attack. If the quetzalcoatlus is flying and dives at least 30 feet toward a target and then hits with a bite attack, the attack deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage to the target.

Flyby. The quetzalcoatlus doesn't provoke an opportunity attack when it flies out of an enemy's reach.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one creature.

Hit: 12 (3d6 + 2) piercing damage.

SCOUT

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 16 (3d8 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Nature +4, Perception +5, Stealth +6, Survival +5

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Keen Hearing and Sight. The scout has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or sight.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The scout makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, ranged 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

SKELETON

Medium undead, lawful evil

Armor Class 13 (armor scraps)

Hit Points 13 (2d8 + 4)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	15 (+2)	6 (-2)	8 (-1)	5 (-3)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages understands all languages it knew in life but can't speak

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

VELOCIRAPTOR

Tiny beast, unaligned

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 10 (3d4 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +3

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Pack Tactics. The velociraptor has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the velociraptor's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The velociraptor makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage.

VROCK

Large fiend (demon), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 104 (11d10 + 44)

Speed 40 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	8 (-1)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +4, Cha +2

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Magic Resistance. The vrock has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vrock makes two attacks: one with its beak and one with its talons.

Beak. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Talons. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Spores (Recharge 6). A 15-foot-radius cloud of toxic spores extends out from the vrock. The spores spread around corners. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. While poisoned in this way, a target takes 5 (1d10) poison damage at the start of each of its turns. A target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. Emptying a vial of holy water on the target also ends the effect on it.

Stunning Screech (1/Day). The vrock emits a horrific screech. Each creature within 20 feet of it that can hear it and that isn't a demon must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of the vrock's next turn.

APPENDIX B: LOCATIONS OF IXALAN

Show these illustrations to the players as their characters progress through the adventure.



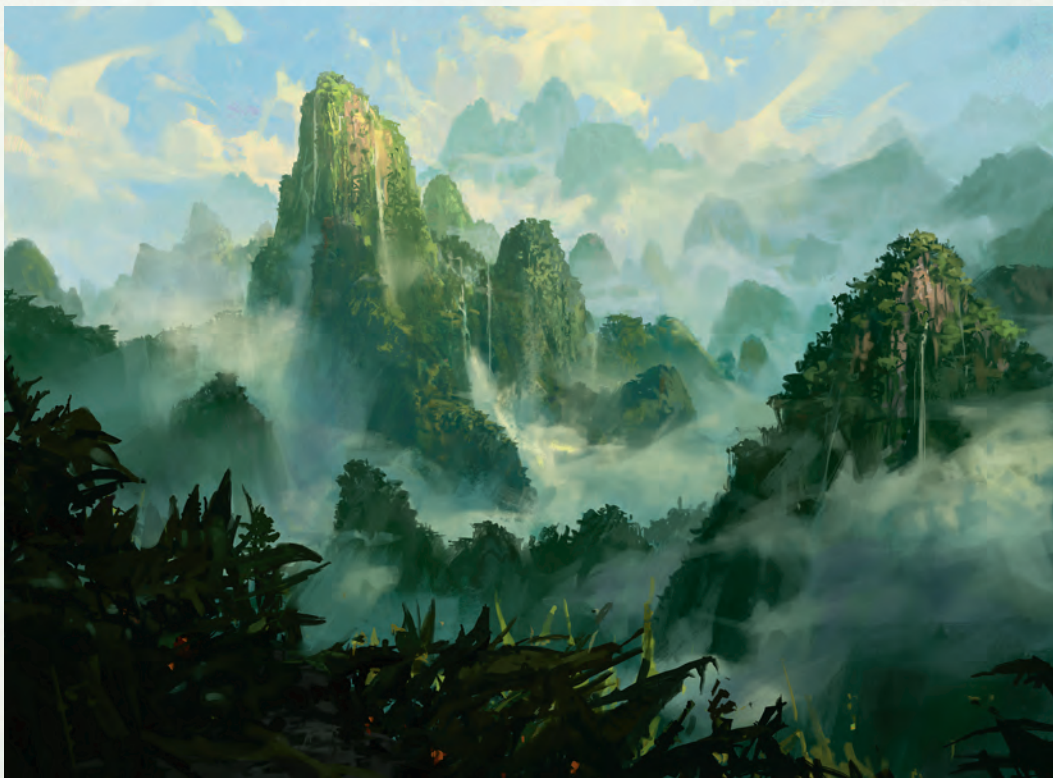
CONQUEROR'S FOOTHOLD



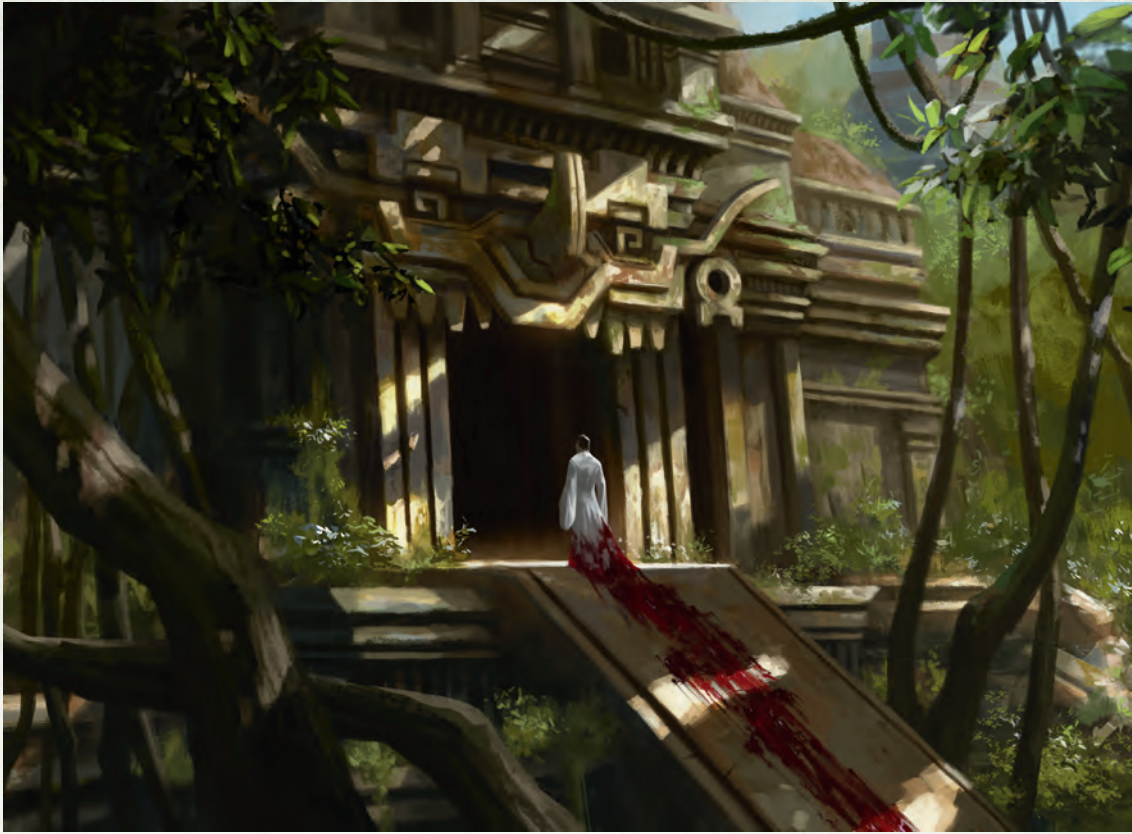
FIELD OF RUIN



PRIMAL WELLSPRING



UNCLAIMED TERRITORY



TEMPLE OF ACLAZOTZ







APPENDIX C: MAP OF IXALAN



APPENDIX D: HIDDEN PLUNDER

If you have the appropriate *Magic: The Gathering* cards from the Ixalan set, you can create a deck and have players draw from it when they find a treasure. Otherwise, roll 1d6 on the table below.

HIDDEN PLUNDER

1d6	Item Name (Card Name)		Description
1	Dowsing Dagger		A curved jade blade fashioned by the River Heralds, this +1 <i>dagger</i> can detect the presence of fresh water within 200 feet of the wielder.
2	Pirate's Cutlass		This +1 <i>shortsword</i> is a terrifying weapon with a serrated edge. It grants its wielder advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks when brandished.
3	Primal Amulet		This beaded jade necklace bears an ancient symbol of the River Heralds. When worn, the <i>primal amulet</i> allows its wearer to cast <i>speak with animals</i> , <i>locate object</i> , and <i>pass without trace</i> . Once the amulet has been used to cast a spell, it can't be used to cast that spell again until the next dawn.
4	Prying Blade		A hooked blade useful on board a ship or as a cutting tool in the wilderness, this +1 <i>shortsword</i> grants its wielder advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks to climb or to escape while restrained.
5	Sorcerous Spyglass		This elegant brass spyglass features an intricate lens mechanism. A creature looking through the <i>sorcerous spyglass</i> has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect things that can be seen. In addition, the user can view magical auras while looking through the spyglass, as if under the effect of a <i>detect magic</i> spell.
6	Vanquisher's Banner		This battle-worn but unbroken standard bears the insignia of one of the forces of the Legion of Dusk. A creature that holds the <i>vanquisher's banner</i> can use a bonus action to grant an ally advantage on the ally's next attack roll, saving throw, or ability check.

APPENDIX E: PLAYER CHARACTERS



ALANTE, CLERIC OF THE FIVE SACRAMENTS



ARTINOQ, ATZOCAN ARCHER



SHARKBAIT



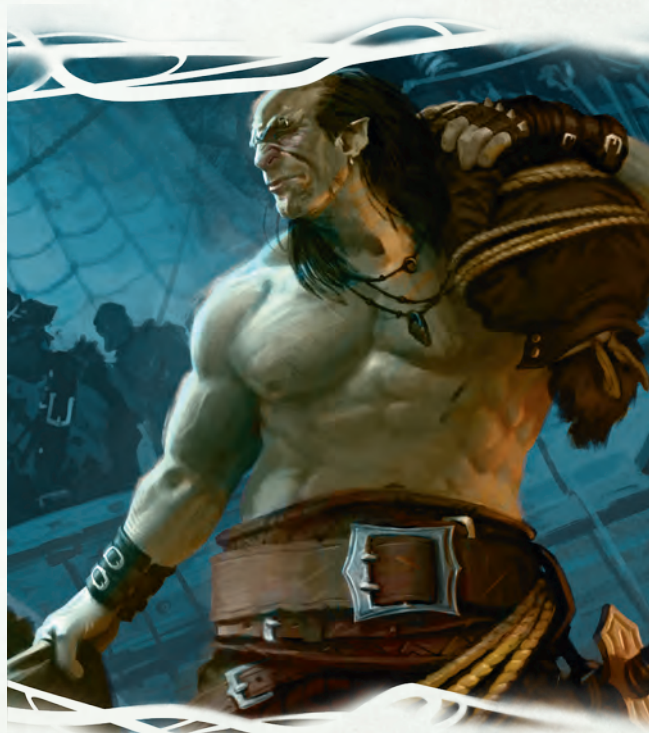
ROUXIL, EMPEROR'S VANGUARD



VELISHA, SHAPER OF HIGHBRANCH



ELLIE REDCAP, FATHOM FLEET FIREBRAND



TURK TWO COINS, RUTHLESS KNAVE

Alante of the Five Sacraments

CHARACTER NAME

Cleric 4 (Knowledge) Noble

CLASS & LEVEL

BACKGROUND

PLAYER NAME

Vampire

RACE

Neutral Good

ALIGNMENT

EXPERIENCE POINTS

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

INSPIRATION

10

- ◇ +0 SAVING THROWS
- +0 ATHLETICS

+0

STRENGTH

8

- ◇ -1 SAVING THROWS
- -1 ACROBATICS
- -1 SLEIGHT OF HAND
- -1 STEALTH

-1

DEXTERITY

14

- ◇ +2 SAVING THROWS

+2

CONSTITUTION

14

- ◇ +2 SAVING THROWS
- +6 ARCANA
- +2 HISTORY
- +2 INVESTIGATION
- +2 NATURE
- +6 RELIGION

+2

INTELLIGENCE

17

- ◇ +5 SAVING THROWS
- +3 ANIMAL HANDLING
- +5 INSIGHT
- +5 MEDICINE
- +5 PERCEPTION
- +3 SURVIVAL

+3

WISDOM

14

- ◇ +4 SAVING THROWS
- +2 DECEPTION
- +2 INTIMIDATION
- +2 PERFORMANCE
- +4 PERSUASION

+2

CHARISMA

15

PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

15

ARMOR CLASS

-1

INITIATIVE

30 ft.

SPEED

HIT POINT MAXIMUM 31

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total 4d8

1d8

HIT DICE

SUCCESSES

FAILURES

DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME ATK BONUS DAMAGE/TYPE

Silver mace	+2	1d8 bludgeoning
Light crossbow	+1	1d8 - 1 piercing
Unarmed	-1	1 bludgeoning

Cleric spellcasting:
Spell save DC 13
Spell attack modifier +5

Cantrips: light, sacred flame,
spare the dying, thaumaturgy

Spell slots: 4 1st level, 3 2nd level

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

Vampire Features:

Darkvision 60 ft.
Resistance to necrotic damage
Bloodthirst - drain blood from willing creature or target that is grappled, incapacitated, or restrained; melee attack (+2 attack, 1 piercing and 1d6 necrotic damage); target's hit point maximum reduced by necrotic damage dealt until after a long rest
Feast of Blood - when you drain blood with Bloodthirst, your speed increases by 10 feet and gain advantage on Strength and Dexterity checks and saving throws for 1 minute

Noble Features:

Position of Privilege (PH page 135)

Cleric Features (PH page 57):

Spellcasting
Turn undead (Wisdom save DC 13)

Knowledge Domain Features (PH page 59):
Blessings of Knowledge (already calculated)
Channel Divinity: Knowledge of the Ages (action, choose a skill or tool, gain proficiency for 10 minutes)

FEATURES & TRAITS

Languages: Common, Merfolk, Siren, Vampire

Tools: Chess (gaming set)

Armor: Light armor, medium armor, shields

Weapons: All simple weapons

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Silver mace, steel shield with a dragon rampant, finely etched breastplate, light crossbow, 20 bolts, silver signet ring with a drop of her past human blood, worn ivory rook (piece of a chess set), holy symbol (focus), backpack, blanket, 10 candles, tinderbox, alms box, 2 blocks of incense, censer, vestments, waterskin

Alante belongs to the Order of the Five Sacraments, a sect of the church that believes in establishing a trade relationship with the Sun Empire. She is opposed other factions within the Legion of Dusk, who seek to conquer and subjugate the Sun Empire. Her kind nature ensured that she was posted at the Conqueror's Foothold to administer last rites to prisoners about to die. However, she spied upon a secret plan set in motion by Vona, the Butcher of Magan to secure a powerful artifact known as the Hierophant's Chalice from its location deep in the interior of Ixalan at the Temple of Aclazotz. The artifact is said to have been carried by Arguel, a prophet known for his fanciful and dark visions, to that place for some unknown purpose. Seeking to gain favor in her order and in opposition to the Adanto sect, she stole the treasure map that leads to the location of the temple. Under cover of night, she freed the prisoners awaiting final judgment to help her navigate the terrain and retrieve the artifact for her superiors before Vona's forces can obtain it for their use.

EQUIPMENT & CHARACTER NOTES

Artinoq, Atzocan Archer

CHARACTER NAME

Ranger (Beast Master) Soldier

CLASS & LEVEL

BACKGROUND

PLAYER NAME

Human

Lawful Good

RACE

ALIGNMENT

EXPERIENCE POINTS

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

INSPIRATION

14

- ◆ +4 SAVING THROWS
- +4 ATHLETICS

+2

STRENGTH

16

- ◆ +5 SAVING THROWS
- +3 ACROBATICS
- +3 SLEIGHT OF HAND
- +5 STEALTH

+3

DEXTERITY

13

- ◆ +1 SAVING THROWS

+1

CONSTITUTION

9

- ◆ -1 SAVING THROWS
- -1 ARCANA
- -1 HISTORY
- -1 INVESTIGATION
- -1 NATURE
- -1 RELIGION

-1

INTELLIGENCE

15

- ◆ +2 SAVING THROWS
- +4 ANIMAL HANDLING
- +2 INSIGHT
- +2 MEDICINE
- +4 PERCEPTION
- +4 SURVIVAL

+2

WISDOM

11

- ◆ +0 SAVING THROWS
- +0 DECEPTION
- +0 INTIMIDATION
- +0 PERFORMANCE
- +0 PERSUASION

+0

CHARISMA

14

PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

16

ARMOR CLASS

+3

INITIATIVE

30 ft.

SPEED

HIT POINT MAXIMUM 32

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total 4d10

1d10

HIT DICE

SUCCESSSES ○○○○

FAILURES ○○○○

DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE/TYPE
Jade longsword	+4	1d8 (1d10) + 2 slashing
Feathered Longbow	+7	1d8 + 3 piercing
Unarmed	+1	1 + 1 bludgeoning

Ranger spellcasting:
Spell save DC 12
Spell attack modifier +4

Spells known: cure wounds, hunter's mark, speak with animals

Spell slots: 3 1st level

Sharkbait (velociraptor): AC 13, hp 16, bite +4 to hit (1d6 +2 piercing damage), claw +4 to hit (1d4 + 2 slashing damage), multiattack (action to use bite and claw), pack tactics (advantage on attack roll when allies are within 5 feet of target), Perception +3

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

Solider Features:
Military Rank (PH page 140)

Ranger Features (PH page 91):
Spellcasting
Favored Enemy (goblins, merfolk)
Natural Explorer (forest)
Archery Fighting Style (already calculated)
Primeval Awareness

Beast Master Features (PH page 93):
Ranger's Companion (velociraptor named Sharkbait; takes its turn on your initiative)

FEATURES & TRAITS

Languages: Common, Merfolk

Tools: Dice (gaming set), vehicles (land)

Armor: Light armor, medium armor, shields

Weapons: Simple weapons, martial weapons

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Jade longsword (trophy from merfolk tribe), feather-adorned longbow, 30 arrows, chain shirt, rank insignia (second commander), mummified goblin hand, backpack, bedroll, mess kit, tinderbox, 10 torches, waterskin, 50 feet of hempen rope

Artinoq serves as a scout in the Emperor's Vanguard under the command of his father Rouxil. A natural leader and selfless soldier, he has been eager to show his father that he is worthy of one day taking over his command once he leaves the field. However, they were captured during a vicious counterattack by the Legion of Dusk while on their last scouting mission to Conqueror's Foothold. Sentenced to death, all seemed lost until Alante appeared and made a deal to free them. Artinoq desires peace much like his father, but his future role in a stable region is unclear as he's spent his young career serving the Sun Empire in battle. He has a velociraptor beast companion named Sharkbait that has served with him for years in the field.

EQUIPMENT & CHARACTER NOTES

Ellie Redcap, Fathom Fleet Firebrand

CHARACTER NAME

Sorcerer (Wild Magic)

CLASS & LEVEL

Sailor

BACKGROUND

PLAYER NAME

Human

RACE

Neutral

ALIGNMENT

EXPERIENCE POINTS

+2 PROFICIENCY BONUS

INSPIRATION

13
+1
STRENGTH

◇ +1 SAVING THROWS
○ +3 ATHLETICS

14
+2
DEXTERITY

◇ +2 SAVING THROWS
○ +2 ACROBATICS
○ +2 SLEIGHT OF HAND
○ +2 STEALTH

14
+2
CONSTITUTION

◇ +4 SAVING THROWS

12
+1
INTELLIGENCE

◇ +1 SAVING THROWS
○ +1 ARCANA
○ +1 HISTORY
○ +1 INVESTIGATION
○ +1 NATURE
○ +1 RELIGION

10
+0
WISDOM

◇ +0 SAVING THROWS
○ +0 ANIMAL HANDLING
○ +0 INSIGHT
○ +0 MEDICINE
○ +2 PERCEPTION
○ +0 SURVIVAL

16
+3
CHARISMA

◇ +5 SAVING THROWS
○ +3 DECEPTION
○ +5 INTIMIDATION
○ +3 PERFORMANCE
○ +5 PERSUASION

12 PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

12
ARMOR CLASS

+2
INITIATIVE

30 ft.
SPEED

HIT POINT MAXIMUM 26

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total 4d6
1d6
HIT DICE

SUCCESSSES ○○○○
FAILURES ○○○○
DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE/TYPE
Obsidian daggers	+4	1d4 + 2 piercing
Light crossbow	+4	1d8 + 2 piercing
Unarmed	+1	1 + 1 bludgeoning

Sorcerer spellcasting:
Spell save DC 13
Spell attack modifier +5

Cantrips: fire bolt, mage hand, mending, message, prestidigitation

Spells known:
1st - burning hands, false life, mage armor
2nd - misty step, scorching ray

Spell slots: 4 1st level, 3 2nd level

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

Sailor Features:
Ship's Passage (PH page 139)

Sorcerer Features (PH page 100):

Spellcasting
Font of Magic (4 Sorcery Points)
Metamagic: Empowered Spell, Quickened Spell

Wild Magic Features (PH page 103):

Wild Magic Surge (DM initiated d20 roll; on a 1, roll on Wild Magic Surge table)
Tides of Chaos (gain advantage on one attack, check, or saving throw; regain on a long rest)

FEATURES & TRAITS

Languages: Common

Weapons: Daggers, darts, slings, quarterstaves, light crossbows

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Two obsidian daggers, light crossbow, 20 bolts, broken compass (focus), backpack, bedroll, mess kit, tinderbox, 10 torches, waterskin, 50 feet of hempen rope

Ellie was the first mate and spelljack aboard the Relentless. She was known for her acumen at sea and her mysterious arcane tattoos inscribed with flame sigils. Ever the opportunist, she rose quickly through the ranks of the crew and was planning a mutiny to oust the captain due to his gross incompetence. His last foolish order saw the pirates in battle with a galleon much too big for their ship, and the goblins in their zeal overloaded a firecannon and blew the ship up. Ellie survived the explosion but was plunged into the sea, and washed ashore with Turk near Conqueror's Foothold. Both were immediately arrested for piracy against the Legion of Dusk, and were due to be executed before being freed by Alante. Ellie brokered a deal – she would help Alante retrieve her artifact, and then she'd be granted a captured ship as payment for her efforts.

EQUIPMENT & CHARACTER NOTES

Rouxil, Emperor's Vanguard

CHARACTER NAME

Fighter (Champion)

CLASS & LEVEL

Human

RACE

Folk Hero

BACKGROUND

Lawful Good

ALIGNMENT

PLAYER NAME

EXPERIENCE POINTS

+2 PROFICIENCY BONUS

INSPIRATION

16

+5 SAVING THROWS

+5 ATHLETICS

+3 STRENGTH

13

+1 SAVING THROWS

+1 ACROBATICS

+1 SLEIGHT OF HAND

+1 STEALTH

+1 DEXTERITY

16

+5 SAVING THROWS

+3 CONSTITUTION

9

-1 SAVING THROWS

-1 ARCANA

-1 HISTORY

-1 INVESTIGATION

-1 NATURE

-1 RELIGION

-1 INTELLIGENCE

11

+0 SAVING THROWS

+2 ANIMAL HANDLING

+0 INSIGHT

+0 MEDICINE

+2 PERCEPTION

+2 SURVIVAL

+0 WISDOM

14

+2 SAVING THROWS

+2 DECEPTION

+2 INTIMIDATION

+2 PERFORMANCE

+2 PERSUASION

+2 CHARISMA

12 PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

18 ARMOR CLASS

+1 INITIATIVE

30 ft. SPEED

HIT POINT MAXIMUM 40

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total 4d10

1d10 HIT DICE

SUCCESSSES ○○○○

FAILURES ○○○○

DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE/TYPE
Ancestral battle axe	+5	1d8 (1d10) + 3 slashing
Javelin	+5	1d6 + 3 piercing
Unarmed	+3	1 + 3 bludgeoning

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

Folk Hero Features:
 Rustic Hospitality (PH page 131)

Fighter Features (PH page 71):
 Defense Fighting Style (already calculated)
 Second Wind (bonus action to regain 1d10 + 4 hit points, regain on short or long rest)
 Action Surge (take an additional action on your turn, regain on short or long rest)

Champion Features (PH page 72):
 Improved Critical (critical hit on a 19 or 20)

FEATURES & TRAITS

Languages: Common

Tools: Woodcutter's tools, vehicles (land)

Armor: All armor, shields

Weapons: Simple weapons, martial weapons

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Ancestral battle axe, 4 javelins, feathered shield, breastplate, writ of Emperor's commendation (to be given by you to a favored soldier), wood for whittling, small carving knives, iron pot, shovel, backpack, bedroll, mess kit, tinderbox, 10 torches, waterskin, 50 feet of hempen rope

Rouxil and his son Artinoq are a part of the Emperor's Vanguard, an elite fighting force that has been fighting skirmishes against the Legion of Dusk ever since their arrival. On their last battle, both of them were the sole survivors from their scouting patrol meant to assess the perimeter defenses of Conqueror's Foothold. They were placed in prison and sentenced to death. Alante heard of their battle acumen, and decided to free them to help her. Rouxil wants Alante to succeed and have her order usurp influence of the region. He believes that if the Order of the Five Sacraments is able to convince the rest of the Legion of Dusk that a reciprocal arrangement with the Sun Empire is beneficial, that he will be able to bring an end to the conflict in this region of Ixalan.

EQUIPMENT & CHARACTER NOTES

Turk Two Coins, Ruthless Knave

CHARACTER NAME

Rogue (Thief)

CLASS & LEVEL

Criminal

BACKGROUND

PLAYER NAME

Orc

RACE

Chaotic Neutral

ALIGNMENT

EXPERIENCE POINTS

+2

PROFICIENCY BONUS

INSPIRATION

16

- ◇ +3 SAVING THROWS
- +7 ATHLETICS

+3

STRENGTH

16

- ◇ +5 SAVING THROWS
- +3 ACROBATICS
- +5 SLEIGHT OF HAND
- +7 STEALTH

+3

DEXTERITY

14

- ◇ +2 SAVING THROWS

+2

CONSTITUTION

10

- ◇ +2 SAVING THROWS
- +0 ARCANA
- +0 HISTORY
- +0 INVESTIGATION
- +0 NATURE
- +0 RELIGION

+0

INTELLIGENCE

8

- ◇ -1 SAVING THROWS
- -1 ANIMAL HANDLING
- -1 INSIGHT
- -1 MEDICINE
- +1 PERCEPTION
- -1 SURVIVAL

-1

WISDOM

12

- ◇ +1 SAVING THROWS
- +3 DECEPTION
- +3 INTIMIDATION
- +3 PERFORMANCE
- +1 PERSUASION

+1

CHARISMA

11

PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

14

ARMOR CLASS

+3

INITIATIVE

30 ft.

SPEED

HIT POINT MAXIMUM 31

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total 4d8

1d8

HIT DICE

SUCCESSES

○ ○ ○ ○

FAILURES

○ ○ ○ ○

DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE/TYPE
Old World rapier	+5	1d8 + 3 piercing
Hand crossbow	+5	1d6 + 3 piercing
Unarmed	+3	1 + 3 bludgeoning

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

Orc Features:

Darkvision 60 ft.

Relentless Endurance (when reduced to 0 hit points and not killed, remain at 1 hit point; regain on long rest)

Savage Attacks (roll an extra damage die on critical hits with melee attacks)

Criminal Features:

Criminal Contact: Fence (PH page 129)

Rogue Features (PH page 95):

Expertise (already calculated)

Sneak Attack (if you have advantage on an attack, deal 2d6 damage with finesse or ranged weapons)

Cunning Action (use Dash, Disengage, or Hide as a bonus action)

Thief Features (PH page 97):

Fast Hands (use Cunning Action to make Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks, disarm traps, open locks, or take Use an Object action)

Second-Story Work (climbing doesn't cost extra movement, +3 feet to running jumps)

FEATURES & TRAITS

Languages: Common, Orc, Thieves' Cant

Tools: Dice (gaming set), thieves' tools

Armor: Light armor

Weapons: Simple weapons, hand crossbows, longswords, rapiers, shortswords

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Old World filigree rapier, hand crossbow, 20 bolts, leather armor, leather cup with 6 knuckle bone dice (gaming set), backpack, bag of 1,000 ball bearings, crowbar, 10 feet of string, bell, 5 candles, 10 pitons, hooded lantern, 2 flasks of oil, tinderbox, waterskin, 50 feet of hempen rope

Turk loves the life of a pirate, and particularly relishes his role as one of the Fathom Fleet's lead boarders, assigned to suppress resistance on captured vessels by intimidation or force. He lives for plunder, and since his job is so risky, he often gets a prime share of the booty. However, his last mission attacking a Legion of Dusk galleon went terribly wrong, and he was thrown from his ship the Relentless by a malfunctioning firecannon explosion. He and the first mate washed ashore near Conqueror's Foothold, where he was immediately recognized by soldiers he had once encountered on a previous raid. The two of them were thrown in prison awaiting execution until Alante showed up to free them to help her navigate through the interior to find an artifact. Turk knows that there's got to be much more treasure than just some chalice, and he's determined to claim a large enough share so he can live out the rest of his life in debauchery.

EQUIPMENT & CHARACTER NOTES

Velisha, Shaper of Highbranch

CHARACTER NAME

Druid 4 (Circle of the Land) Outlander

CLASS & LEVEL

BACKGROUND

PLAYER NAME

Merfolk (Green)

Chaotic Good

RACE

ALIGNMENT

EXPERIENCE POINTS

+2 PROFICIENCY BONUS

INSPIRATION

9
-1
STRENGTH

◇ -1 SAVING THROWS
○ +1 ATHLETICS

12
+1
DEXTERITY

◇ +1 SAVING THROWS
○ +1 ACROBATICS
○ +1 SLEIGHT OF HAND
○ +1 STEALTH

14
+2
CONSTITUTION

◇ +2 SAVING THROWS

10
+0
INTELLIGENCE

◇ +2 SAVING THROWS
○ +0 ARCANA
○ +0 HISTORY
○ +0 INVESTIGATION
○ +2 NATURE
○ +0 RELIGION

18
+4
WISDOM

◇ +6 SAVING THROWS
○ +6 ANIMAL HANDLING
○ +6 INSIGHT
○ +4 MEDICINE
○ +6 PERCEPTION
○ +6 SURVIVAL

14
+2
CHARISMA

◇ +2 SAVING THROWS
○ +2 DECEPTION
○ +2 INTIMIDATION
○ +2 PERFORMANCE
○ +2 PERSUASION

16 PASSIVE WISDOM (PERCEPTION)

13
ARMOR CLASS

+1
INITIATIVE

30 ft.
SPEED

HIT POINT MAXIMUM 31

CURRENT HIT POINTS

TEMPORARY HIT POINTS

Total 4d8
1d8
HIT DICE

SUCCESSSES ○○○○
FAILURES ○○○○
DEATH SAVES

PERSONALITY TRAITS

IDEALS

BONDS

FLAWS

NAME	ATK BONUS	DAMAGE/TYPE
Jade staff	+1	1d6 - 1 bludgeoning
Sling	+3	1d4 + 1 bludgeoning
Unarmed	-1	1 bludgeoning

Druid spellcasting:
Spell save DC 14
Spell attack modifier +6

Cantrips: druidcraft, guidance, resistance, shillelagh, thorn whip

Spell slots: 4 1st level, 3 2nd level

ATTACKS & SPELLCASTING

Merfolk (Green) Features:
Swim speed 30 ft.
Amphibious (breathe both air and water)
Bonus druid cantrip

Outlander Features:
Wanderer (PH page 136)

Druid Features (PH page 65):
Spellcasting
Wild shape (max. CR 1/4, no swimming or flying)

Circle of the Land Features (PH page 68):
Bonus druid cantrip
Natural recovery (two levels worth of spell slots per short rest)
Circle spells - barkskin, spider climb

FEATURES & TRAITS

Languages: Common, Druidic, Merfolk, Orc, Vampire

Tools: Herbalism kit, pipes (musical instrument)

Armor: Light armor, medium armor, shields (non metal only)

Weapons: Clubs, daggers, darts, javelins, maces, quarterstaves, scimitars, sickles, slings, spears

OTHER PROFICIENCIES & LANGUAGES

Jade armor (studded leather), jade staff (quarterstaff), sling, 20 sling stones, Highbranch tribal amulet (druidic focus), regisaur claw (trophy), hunting trap, pipes (musical instrument), herbalism kit, backpack, bedroll, mess kit, tinderbox, 10 torches, waterskin, 50 feet of hempen rope

Velisha is a shaper, a weaver of nature magic. Her tribe dwells in a forested community known as Highbranch, and she serves as a guide. In this role, she was employed by a Dusk Legion lieutenant under Vona's command to escort a wayward patrol back to Conqueror's Foothold. When she arrived, the lieutenant claimed that some of the soldiers she had been escorting had stolen from them. After attempting to fight off the soldiers and escape, she was captured and sentenced to death. Alante freed her from her fate and told her of what she needed done in exchange. Velisha knows the interior well, and has heard that the Temple of Aclazotz contains a dark unnatural force. She means to expel it.

EQUIPMENT & CHARACTER NOTES

Streaming Highlights

This issue we highlight upcoming livestream games based on the *Guildmasters' Guide to Ravnica* and plunder D&D Beyond for cosplay tips.



RAVNICA: BROKEN PACT

“At the time of the Broken Pact, the city plane of Ravnica is experiencing an identity crisis. Similarly, the main characters will be grappling with their own sense of self,” says DM Reuben Bresler of his new D&D game taking place in the *Magic: The Gathering* setting. “The events that bring the group together could also easily drive them apart. And in the classic noir style, no one can be truly trusted. Not even your fellow party members.”

[Watch Clip](#)

Ravnica: Broken Pact streams Saturdays 1PM PT on [the official](#)

[D&D Twitch channel](#), starting October 13.

LOADINGREADYRUN

LoadingReadyRun is a group of Canadian comedians, entertainers, audio/video producers and streamers. Set up as a creative outlet for co-founders Graham Stark and Paul Saunders to fulfill their desire to make funny videos, it has since grown into an internet comedy destination.

Kathleen De Vere is DMing a D&D/ *Magic: The Gathering* crossover stream for other members of the LoadingReadyRun family. Before they begin their quest through Ravnica get a taste of their work by checking out the comedy show *Friday Nights: The Card*.

d20 DAMES

“In season two the Dames leave the beloved town of Phandalin in pursuit of their personal quests... but they’ve set up a mail forwarding system so expect to hear from some fan-fave NPCs,” says DM and Chief Wordsmith Kat Kruger when *Dragon+* stops by to say hi.

“Socially awkward tiefling ranger Riot is reunited with one of her siblings as they track down the rest of the family. Rose—the human seamstress monk who mends souls and holes—attempts to follow

vague leads about the Dark Sisterhood. And an earth genasi druid named Loraya joins the party after a showdown with agents of the Raven Queen.

“Their travels will take them south through Waterdeep where they’ll meet a number of new NPCs—sometimes played by special guests—and get mixed up in what the City of Splendors has to offer.”

[Listen Here](#)

Fans of the d20 Dames can catch a live show at GeekGirlCon (October 27-28 in Seattle) and see the party play through original content for the Extra Life charity stream on [the official D&D Twitch channel](#) on 3 November.

FISTFUL OF PLATINUM

Fistful of Platinum DM Alan Patrick is going to be taking the wonders found inside [Beadles & Grimm’s Platinum Edition box set](#) for *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* and lovingly putting them to use in a livestream.

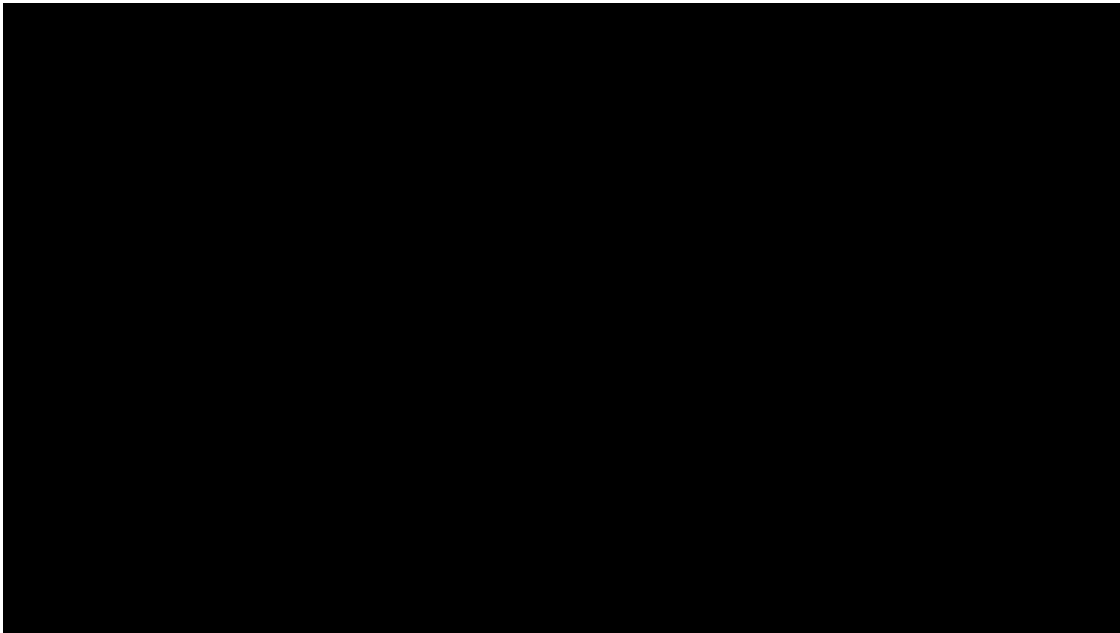
Join Lindsey Rode (human rogue Agnus Copper), Michael Konas (goliath cleric Otter Thrud), Jennifer Patrick (half-orc fighter Astrid), Trisha Kosloski (gnome bard Magpie) and Jessie Swinton (tiefling warlock Marcellus) as they get their hands on more limited edition swag than you’d find at a pirate’s convention.

Fistful of Platinum streams Saturdays 9AM-1PM PT on [the official D&D Twitch channel](#), starting December.

D&D BEYOND

With Halloween upon us and some outstanding costumes coming up later this issue we plundered the D&D Beyond back catalogue for more cosplay tips.

“Every once in a while I run into a cosplay that stops me dead in my tracks. And this is one of them,” says Todd Kenreck about an amazing kenku cosplay that would make any D&D fan double-take.



D&D Beyond also celebrated Dani Hartel's Scrummy cosplay (which we know Vivid Vivka is also a fan of, more from her later this issue). The gnome warlock was brought fully to life at the Stream of Many Eyes earlier this year and Hartel reveals how the character has helped her personally in so many ways.

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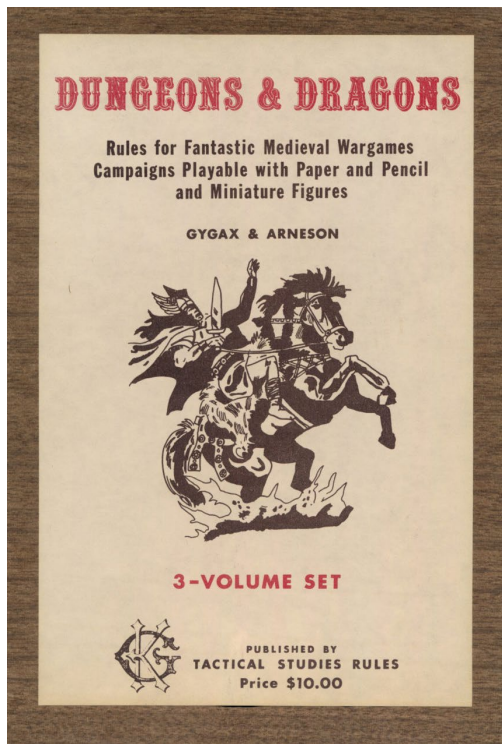


Art and Arcana

Dragon+ spoke with Kyle Newman, Jon Peterson and brothers Michael and Sam Witwer about their visual history of *Dungeons & Dragons*.

“Covering forty-five years of art, advertising, and ephemera of the greatest game on Earth is a formidable task, and one that requires an appropriately comprehensive approach...”

If you’re wondering why a book on the history of *Dungeons & Dragons* has four authors, that snippet from an early section of *Art & Arcana* is all the explanation you need. Bringing together everything from the “evolution” of the game’s bizarre and grotesque creatures to the “arteology” expedition needed to create an authentic visual history, the commentary is all the richer for having had quadruple the manpower.



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“One of the things we talked about after this project was complete and we were flicking through the book was why does it have four authors?” says co-author and actor Sam Witwer. “But my brother and I were aware of how dramatically inferior the book would be if you subtract any one of the authors from the process.

“It’s shocking to think how different the book would be without all of us being involved as everyone brought what they found to be special about *Dungeons & Dragons* to the table. If we were going to make an essential book, we all had to bring our own essential experiences to it.”

A Balanced Party

“When it came to our skillsets we had a very balanced party,” says Michael Witwer, author of the 2015 book *Empire of Imagination: Gary Gygax and the Birth of Dungeons & Dragons*.

“Jon [Peterson] is an expert on *Dungeons & Dragons* history so he made sure we weren’t taking any wrong steps. Meanwhile, Kyle is a filmmaker so he brings a visual element to everything. Michael brings a very accessible prose style and kept the book entertaining. And I just hung out,” adds Sam Witwer with a laugh.



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“Honestly, Sam is incredibly knowledgeable,” Newman says. “He may not have written about *D&D* previously but he’s got an amazing recollection of everything he’s ever played. He brought a well-described, visceral reaction to the work that let us know why something was important and why an image made him feel a certain way. It was great hearing him recollect all of these personal tales and that made us realize this is such a universal experience.”

Balanced party or not, the act of finding historical content that had lain hidden all this time and boiling it down into a single book is itself a legendary action.

“From my perspective it seemed entirely overwhelming. Luckily my brother has the kind of organizational mind I do not have,” says Sam Witwer. “He was able to take a one-step-at-a-time approach and direct our efforts in specific ways to help us build this. I had a vague idea of how it might come together and how it could be entertaining. And Kyle had initial ideas of how it could be beautiful. But boy, Mike and Jon killed it in terms of the organizational skill required to even begin such a task.”

“It was Herculean,” agrees Newman. “But I think that’s partly why it was so awesome. At the beginning we asked, ‘What is this going to be? How is it going to work? How do we bring our styles together so

it doesn't feel like disparate voices?'



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“I was an art history minor at New York University while I was studying film so I always had this affinity for the evolution and history of design and style. But we wanted this to feel like a unified vision. And I quickly realized that creating this book was not dissimilar to making a movie. There were all these different phases to it. We went through the research phase, the organizational phase until you reach the reality of: ‘What do we have to actually work with?’ To continue the movie comparison you find yourself asking, ‘What did we actually shoot? And how are we going to assemble it? Then how do we refine it and post-produce it?’

“We didn’t only want it to be art with minimum words. We wanted to actually look at the importance of the art involved. And we wanted to include an ephemera of products, animation, and curios from the history of the game. That’s why we came together with different perspectives, different histories of the game, and different skill sets.”

Arteology

One of the most important jobs was finding all of the amazing art that’s been created over the years. From the covers of the modules and source books themselves to the magazine advertisements and

promotional posters sent to shops, there was so much to track down.



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“These aren’t images you can just Google. A lot of the stuff we collected won’t have been seen before. And even if you think you have seen it, you’ve never seen the native art in its full glory,” says Newman. “Some of what we’ve captured was only rumored to exist and we were like, ‘Whoa, that’s real?’ That’s what’s mind-blowing about it. You think you know the history of *D&D* and you do. But there’s stuff in this book that’s going to change the way you look at it.”

“In a very real way, Jon is Indiana Jones when it comes to *Dungeons & Dragons*,” reveals Michael Witwer. “There were several shocking discoveries during this process in terms of finding an artifact, a painting or a new piece of information. It was Jon who spearheaded the sometimes dangerous process of ‘arteology’.”

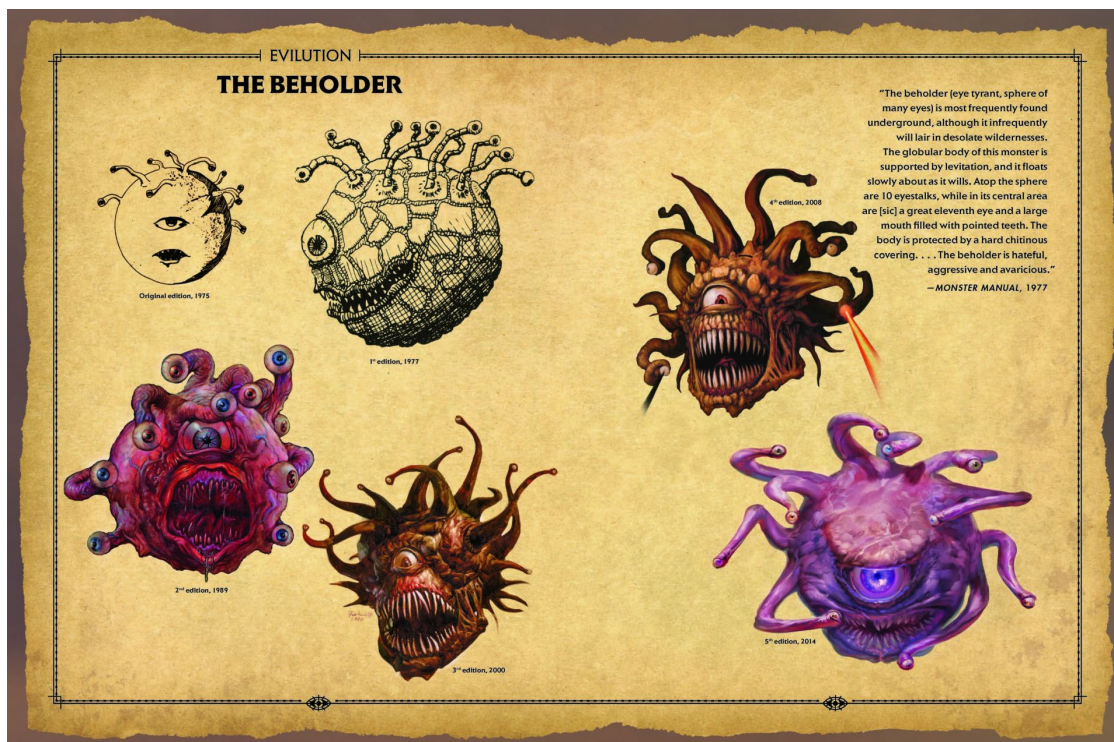
Having already written the 2012 book *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures, from Chess to Role-Playing Games*, Peterson had the research skills the team needed.



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“We all got to bring our own passion to this project, and I’m really passionate about finding things. We had unprecedented access to the Wizards archives but when it came to early rarities most of what we needed wasn’t just tucked away in a closet in Seattle. Most of the material created before 1985 had been scattered to the nine winds. Luckily I’m a bit of a collector myself so I know a lot of people who have accumulated relevant material,” Peterson says.

“A lot of the fun of this process was hunting down where these things had ended up. I had to go to London to Ian Livingstone’s house to photograph the original *Fiend Folio* painting, which he has on his wall. He was generous enough to let us come in and take a look at it.”



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“Generally speaking, there’s almost nothing we couldn’t find,” says Michael Witwer. We had a lot of confidence going in because we knew who the biggest original art collector of *D&D* was and we knew the person who holds the most pristine collection of product in the world. We knew where three of the original hardcover paintings were—those original wraparound, hardcover paintings for *AD&D* books. But there’s five in total.

“We thought if we could deliver elements like three of those five paintings that would be something of high value. I don’t think any of us for a moment thought we’d find everything that we did. It was amazing to track down all five of the original *AD&D* hardcover wraparound covers that no-one has ever seen in their native form.”

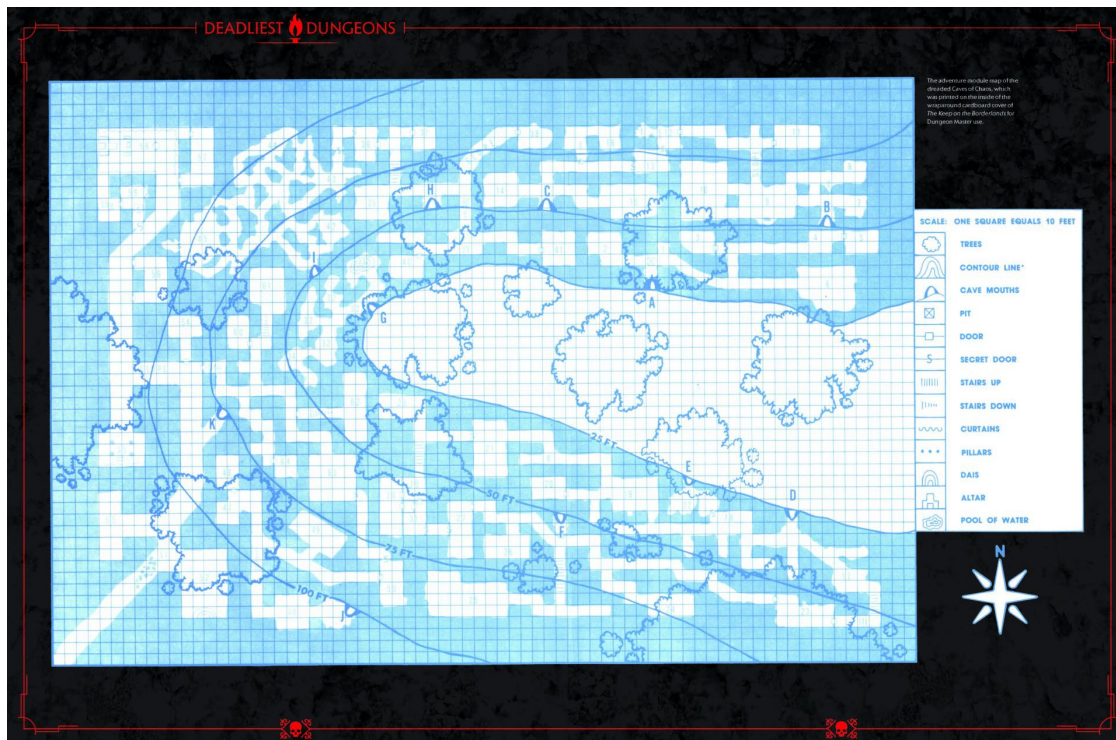
Some of the original draft material also provided new details about the first days of *D&D*. Learning how the art progressed from those earliest moments helped shine a light on some unsung heroes.

“The names in the original booklets and the people who signed these pieces of art have largely been lost to *D&D* history. Artists such as Greg Bell, Keenan Powell and Tracy Lesch—except for probably Gary himself, nobody really knew who these people were. So to rediscover that story and understand the context of how this thing grew up was extraordinary.”

Art for Art's Sake

“There was a fundamental discussion about whether we wanted to make an art book—strictly an art book—versus a visual history,” remembers Michael Witwer. “In the end, we developed a visual history that happens to contain more art than a *D&D* book ever has. Does it have ephemera? Absolutely. Does it have rare photographs? Yes. Does it have draft maps of some of the game’s most seminal material? Of course.”

One of the real triumphs of *Art & Arcana* is how that visual material shines through to tell its own story. The book works as a traditional historical tome but the entire history of the game is also told equally well through its images.



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“You can read it from cover to cover and it will tell an amazing story. But you don’t need to. By flipping through this book, you very clearly understand the story and the visual evolution of this game. To borrow a phrase I’ve heard Jon use, the book works with the sound off. And every spread makes an awful lot of sense because we went to so much trouble to tell a chronological narrative,” says Michael Witwer.

“By juxtaposing images next to each other you start discovering these relationships—both in color and in subject matter,” adds Sam Witwer.

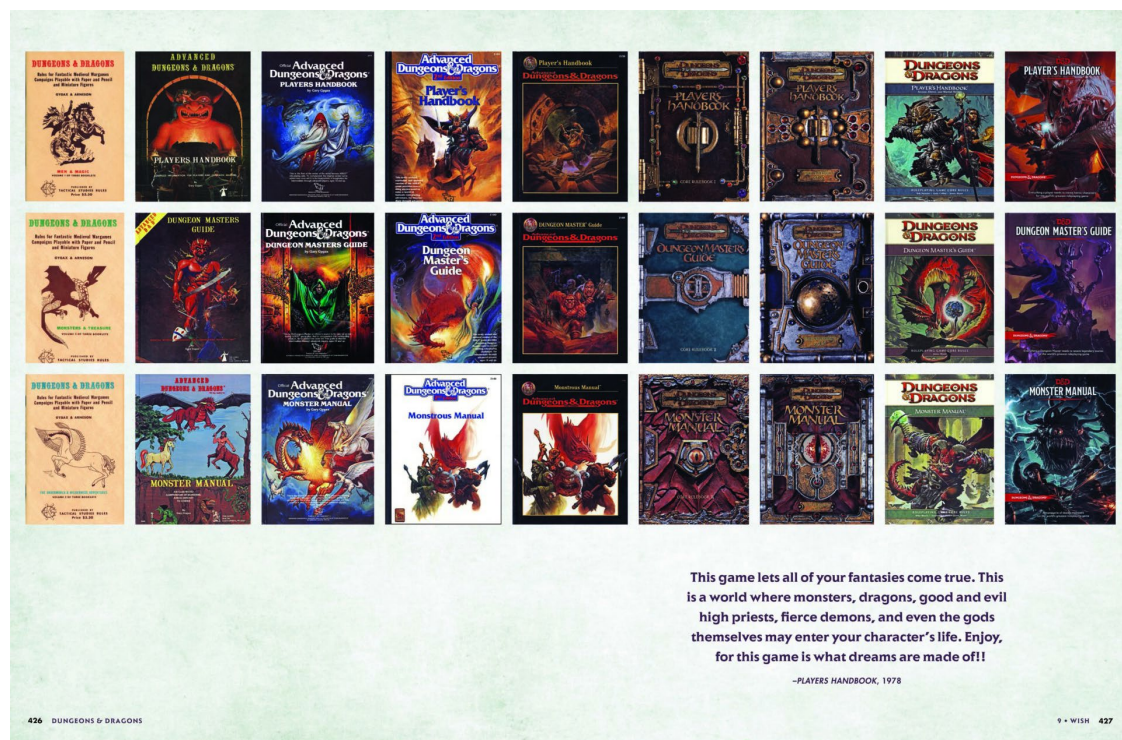
Over 100 of the included images required individual permissions or licenses: from *D&D* pinball machines to stills from *Stranger Things*, *Family Guy*, *Futurama*, *E.T.* and many more pop culture references.

“One of the things we’re most excited about is the idea that we’ve got the entire story, both inside the game and things that were happening culturally to influence the game, and then how the game influenced the culture,” says Michael Witwer.

Fighting the Flab

“As fans of the game, we wrote the book we wanted to buy,” says Michael Witwer. “To that end we spared no expense when it came to our time, our resources and beyond.”

That’s borne out by the size of the finished item. When the project was first proposed, the four co-authors expected to tell the history of *D&D* using 350 images and 35,000 words. The finished product actually contains more than 700 images (whittled down from several thousand) and around 50,000 words.



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“We had to be really selective to even get it that light,” says Sam Witwer, confirming the scale of the project.

“We did end up with a bunch of stuff on the cutting room floor, to follow Kyle’s filmmaking metaphor,” says Peterson. “We collected thousands of images that all tell a unique part of the story of *D&D* and we had to make some tough choices to hone that down. What we ended up with feels slender to me. It isn’t 440 pages of flab—this is lean, mean, mind-blowing stuff!”

Art & Arcana is released on 23 October 2018 and is available for [pre-order on Amazon.com](#) . A boxed Special Edition containing the book and ephemera [is also available](#) .

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Betrayal Legacy

Lead Designer Rob Daviau reveals how the mystery will deepen in *Betrayal Legacy*.

“The game has always been near and dear to my heart, which is a weird thing to say about a horror game,” says Rob Daviau of *Betrayal at House on the Hill*. The board game of spooks and shadows will soon, like any good horror monster, take on a new incarnation. This time it will be hitting tabletops as *Betrayal: Legacy*, adding the customized storytelling of a legacy model to the game players love.

Dragon+ went behind the scenes with Daviau, Lead Designer on the project, to find what is lurking in the house this time around as *Betrayal Legacy* unlocks the origins of our favorite haunted house.



How did you become involved with *Betrayal Legacy*?

Betrayal at House on the Hill is the only game I've worked on but I still like to play as a player, which is saying something. So when Shelly [Mazzanoble] came to me in 2016 and talked about creating *Betrayal Legacy*, I jumped at the opportunity.

What secrets will players be uncovering in the house this time around?

I made a pitch to Wizards of the Coast that this game would be an origin story of sorts. In this abandoned house, there's all these weird ghosts and items and rooms and I thought, 'How did these get here?'

Horror works because you don't know what's going on, so there's always a danger that if you explain everything it takes away the mystery of it. We wanted to tell an origin story of how *some* of the things in the house came to be, but leave other things as mysteries even as you play through the 350 years of this house's history.

How will *Betrayal Legacy* differ from the original game?

In many ways it's going to be very similar. We took what you can do on a turn and codified it. We didn't really change it, as what you can do in *Betrayal* is naturally quite loose. It reminds me of early roleplaying games—you kind of



have to figure it out. We just wanted to smooth that out.

(Select to view)

We also added a fourth region, which is outside. The game starts in 1666, set in New England. In the United States at that time you didn't have a lot of big mansions. If the house is starting out small, you need a place you can go so we added an outside region for players to explore.



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We also included the idea of heirlooming items, which allows the legacy aspect where one game leads onto the next. We loved the idea that you're a member of a family and if you get an item, you can heirloom it and put your family's sticker on it. This makes it more powerful if you or any of your descendants have it.

The item might be something rather mundane like a pitchfork, but to your character it will be 'Pokey Joe: My family's pitchfork'. You mark it, can name it and stories will naturally build up around it. So the items almost become NPCs within the game.

Have any changes been made to the haunts?

We also restructured those. Looking at the original game, the haunts had some similarities in how they were written, but a lot of times each haunt had a slightly different way that it was organized.

We realized that whenever a haunt starts you've got two groups of people who have to go and learn the rules to a new game under duress, and the traitor is often doing this by themselves. Some people really like that, as they get to feel in control and it's almost like being the DM. But a lot of people feel pressure at that point. So while we were arranging the mechanics into a more organized system, we also did the same thing to the haunts to try and make them easier to understand.



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When the haunt starts there's this moment of huge excitement, but then you have to go learn the rules of the game before you start having fun. So we tried to make that as smooth and as short as we could, so you start playing the haunt as fast as possible.

In some cases, it was simply having the players stay together longer as the haunt is learned. We noticed that one of the playtest groups did a lot of setup together and realized there was no reason not to, so we integrated that into the game to make it smoother and get people into the action faster.

Does *Betrayal Legacy* blur the lines between board gaming and RPG?

Betrayal, to me, was always very much a cross between a roleplaying game and a board game; it's a self-generating horror RPG. And then, halfway through, it asks someone to become the bad guy. It DMs you through that experience and we very much wanted to keep that feeling.

One of the ideas we had for *Betrayal Legacy* is that by the end of the campaign you'll have a worn-in version of the game. You'll have only seen a third of the haunts—if that—so you can just keep playing and playing. It's open-ended.

TEN WAYS THIS GAME IS DIFFERENT FROM THE ORIGINAL GAME

If you have played the original *Betrayal at House on the Hill*[®], many things in this game will be familiar. However, there are a few new things.

- 1. There is a campaign mode, guided by the Legacy deck.**

Each game, after you've set up, draw the top card of the Legacy deck, read it aloud, and continue to draw and read cards, one at a time, until instructed to PAUSE or STOP.
- 2. There are new terms: bury, heal, critical, and general damage.**

There are no discard piles. Any time you would discard a tile or card, instead **bury** that tile or card by placing it at the bottom of its deck or stack, face down.

Heal allows you to reset a trait to its starting value if it's below that value. A trait is **critical** when it is 1 step above the skull.

General damage may be allocated to any trait.
- 3. There is an outside region.**

At the start of each game you'll put out the Front Steps tile, which is adjacent to the Entrance Hall and is the Landing tile for the outside region.
- 4. Item and Event cards are drawn only in certain regions.**

When you draw Item or Event cards, you'll draw ones that match the region you're exploring in, just like tiles.
- 5. Some tiles have new features: secret passages, Runestones, ghosts, or more than one symbol.**

Secret passages allow you to move between rooms that aren't adjacent to each other.

Runestones are sometimes important in a haunt.

Ghosts power up Omen cards and sometimes make Events worse.

On tiles with more than one symbol, resolve each symbol from left to right when the tile is discovered.
- 6. You turn Item and Omen cards sideways to mark they are used.**

Cards have two states: **used** and **unused**. When you've used an Item or Omen card, turn it sideways. At the start of your turn, straighten used cards to show that they're ready to use again.
- 7. Sometimes cards get altered.**

Some cards will get names. Some will get stickered. Some will have checkboxes filled on them. Once per game, when you draw an Item card from the deck that has space for an Heirloom sticker, you may choose to make it your family's **heirloom**.
- 8. What you can do on a turn is organized into actions.**

When you want to do something other than move, you use an action (such as DRINK, ATTACK, or INVOKE). You can use each action word only once on your turn.
- 9. Haunts trigger differently during the campaign and in free play after the campaign.**

Look at the Legacy deck to see what you need to do for the haunt to start in that chapter.
- 10. The haunts use colored boxes to explain your goals.**

Each step needed to win a haunt, plus any optional steps and other facts, are listed in order, each in their own box. See "Learning the Haunt" for examples of what these boxes look like. Also, goals and effects scale with the number of players in the game, indicated by three numbers in braces in the haunt books, such as {12/15/20}. In this case, 12 is for three players, 15 is for four, and 20 is for five.

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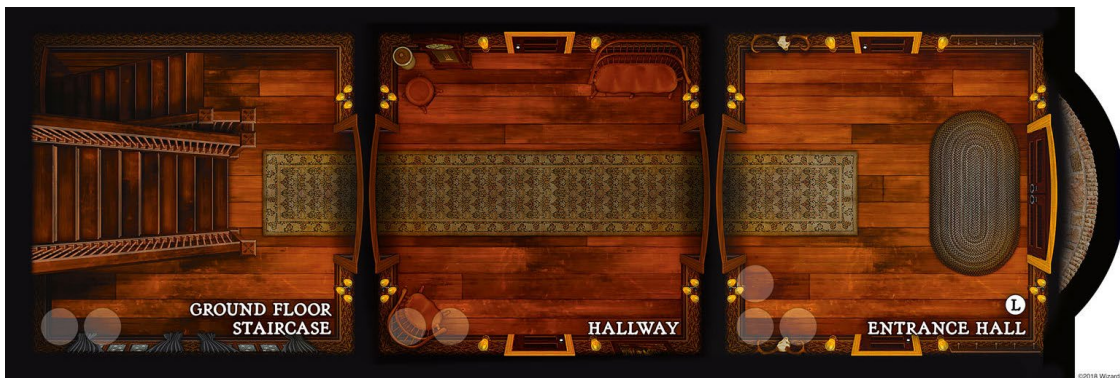
Unlike an RPG, where you usually get attached to your character and, if they die, you want them to die in some sort of heroic way, in this game your character has to be very disposable. So we didn't want players to be attached to any of the individual characters, it's more that you're attached to the family and the family line becomes the character. But it's the house itself which is very much the main

character.

What deeper insights can you share about the new gameplay of *Betrayal Legacy*?

We tried to focus on the narrative. You have your character's fate, which you record on the back of each card, and naturally players will start to make a story out of that. We realized that we didn't have to change characters mechanically to get most of what we wanted.

As you play through *Betrayal Legacy*, you'll play different haunts and, as things happen, at the end of each game you'll be told to take certain cards from the Purgatory Deck. The Purgatory Deck is a stack of cards that contains all sorts of different things—such as Event cards and Item cards—and depending on what actions you did or what haunts you found, you'll take certain cards and move them to the game's main decks. This helps fuel the sense that you are playing chapters in a book rather than unconnected games.



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As an example, let's say, in one game, you murdered someone in the basement. You might then be told to put a card into the event deck that has a ghost running around the basement. But another group, who didn't commit that murder, won't have that card in their event deck. So many games later, you draw the event card and that ghost attacks you—if it was your family who killed him eighty years ago you can see why he's mad and you get that connection between cause and effect.

Even more, these Event cards can also intensify and get worse. Let's say you burn that ghost's family Items. Now the ghost, that you created, is even angrier. You then find that ghost's Event card and put a check box on it to show that it has intensified. Now not only do you

have a ghost, you have a particularly angry one! So some players might end up with fewer cards in their deck but they'll be more intense.

What's interesting about *Betrayal Legacy* is that your character might do something and then you won't see the ramifications for five games. Every card has a story for why it's in there, and the history and items on the cards will end up having ghost stories attached to them.

How did you expand the horror elements and haunts of the game for *Betrayal Legacy*?

As with most horror novels, as the player you don't fully understand what's going on. Usually for the first two acts of a good horror story, the heroes are just on their heels and there's a lot of mystery.

That mystery usually resolves into focus, and once the heroes start to get a little bit more knowledge they try to win by either escaping or defeating the evil, or otherwise putting themselves in a position where they're controlling the action.



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We tried to mimic that. We wanted the main story to slowly come into focus and have different groups discover different clues at different times until it's explained. To achieve that we studied horror structure, both cinematic and literary, which was a lot of fun.

What did you learn about the horror genre?

Our big question was how much we wanted to explain about why the house is haunted. Is it haunted because of something particularly bad happened there once and that echoes through? Or is there an external force? Is the house itself possessed with some sort of malevolence? We discussed different options that could cause evil to flourish.

The best horror keeps people guessing as long as possible. Because once you see the source of the horror and you know it, it loses its mystery. We need the players to ask: 'Were the clues all there in

retrospect?’ As a designer you have to strike a balance—if you give the clues too clearly, then someone can guess it right away and it takes away all the build-up. But you don’t want to be too subtle either.

The original *Betrayal* plays on 1950s and ’60s horror tropes—think those semi-campy, Universal Pictures kind of monsters. Between the original game and the *Widow’s Walk* expansion, that genre had been mined pretty well. We realized that if this game starts in 1666 and goes until present times, we have the opportunity to explore the horror tropes of each generation it passes through.

We started by asking what were people afraid of in the 1600s? If you look at the New England puritanical myths, they were afraid of witches or werewolves or possession by the devil. Move into the mid-19th century and you get Frankenstein-type stories; science gone amok. Fast forward to the 1940s and its radiation, mutations and the end of the world. In this game, you’re doing a walk-through of horror tropes of the last 350 years.

We had to resist the temptation to turn it into a graduate course on the evolution of horror. People want to play a game, not read a thesis. But it was great for myself and the other writers and designers to block out the chapters.

Even before there was an overall plot, we wrote the themes of each chapter, charting what people were afraid of in each of these eras. We converted all of that into what it would look like as a haunt and chose an omen that would reflect that.

[What are some of your personal highlights for the new Legacy version?](#)

I really like how we cleaned up both the rules structure and how players learn the haunts. Hopefully people will get to the end and want to keep playing the other haunts that they missed. That’s why after the game ends, we’ve included a freeplay option.

We borrowed this concept from video games; the idea that you can keep playing after the campaign ends. Nothing else changes and essentially you play a game in the world you ended up with. We wanted a multiverse of slightly different houses all with a similar but different backstory. At the end of the campaign everyone will have a

version of *Betrayal* with their own ghost stories.

*How does the legacy aspect come into play in *Betrayal Legacy*?*

At the beginning of the campaign each player picks a family and writes down the first name of the member of that family. You give them an age and introduce yourself: “Hi I’m Jerimiah and I’m fourteen years old.” This leads into the roleplaying.

At the end of the game you write down the fate of your first character. Most of the time this will be how you died, but if you were still alive you will record a memorable moment that happened in the game—like killing that person in the basement.

When you move onto the next game, it’s twenty-five years later and you write down the name of a new character. Let’s say this time you play Isabelle, the niece of Jerimiah who died mysteriously. The family would never tell you how Jerimiah died so Isabelle decides to go and check out the house to see if there is any evidence of what happened to him.



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Alternatively, if your character did survive, you can play that same person only twenty-five years older. Maybe you went a bit mad after events at the house and decide to return to investigate?

You sit down to tell a ghost story and we wanted to give you a reason to sit down and tell fourteen ghost stories in a row.

*What are you most excited to see from players as they engage with *Betrayal Legacy*?*

There are different levels of excitement in terms of how I think people will respond. I hope this game provokes stories and fan fiction and diary narratives and a lot of other things that will make people talk and write about it. Beyond any regular review they’ll have an ongoing journal with this game, and that just gets me really excited.

To find out more about *Betrayal Legacy* visit the [Avalon Hill website](#)

; or **preorder the game** ahead of its release on 9 November 2018.

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Introducing the Exclusive

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

WATERDEEP DRAGON HEIST

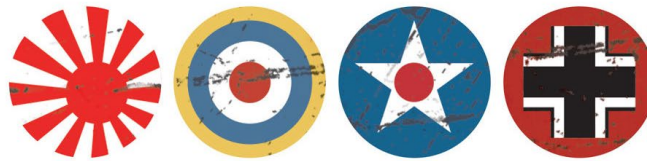


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Axis & Allies & Zombies

Long-time fan Scott Van Essen used a three-decade love affair with *Axis & Allies* to create an undead variant of the classic war game. *Dragon+* met up with him to discuss zombie mechanics and learn why players should embrace the chaos.

When it comes to historic eras of combat you'd be hard-pressed to find a theater of battle more chaotic than World War II. Terrifying new machines of destruction were being unleashed onto the battlefield while the horrors of chemical weaponry crept into international arsenals, fueled by the relentless machinations and movements of ruthless politics.

What could possibly add to that madness? How about throwing in a few zombies. The classic brain-hungry foes have been rampantly successful of late, taking over the small screen, appearing in a slew of new video games, rampaging through Hollywood and even bringing their infectious charisma into the poised world of Jane Austen. They're the perfect addition to board gaming.

Meet The Necromancer

The job of unleashing the zombie hordes into the global conflict of WWII went to Lead Designer Scott Van Essen. He was tasked with raising the dead from the battlefield and shambling them onto a much-beloved board game using the universal truth that zombies make everything more interesting.

"I certainly think so!" Van Essen says with a laugh. "And I hope a lot of players would agree. The appeal of zombie gaming is to taste the horror but still feel like you have control.



“*Axis & Allies & Zombies* was actually something we’ve been talking about doing for years. We were satisfied with our early testing, so we went right in, made a game, refined it, and now we’re very happy with the results. We feel players get that sense of triumph against overwhelming odds, which is a very fun part of the experience.

“There are a lot of zombie games out there already and we didn’t want this to just be a zombie game with *Axis & Allies* slapped onto it. We wanted the zombies to feel like an inherent part of the game. So all the way through development we made sure they were integrated into the game mechanics as tightly as possible.”

Given the loss of life during a World War, it might seem deceptively easy to unleash those corpses as undead in an existing game. While the zombified soldiers did fit quite naturally within the existing *Axis & Allies* game, it took some retooling of the rules to make them fit perfectly.

“One thing we found as we designed and developed the game was that the less rules we needed for the zombies the better the game got,” explains Van Essen.



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“One of our first questions was whether the Axis powers and the Allies should be working together against the zombies? Or should it be a three-sided game where one side is the zombies? Or should it be a traditional two-sided *Axis & Allies* game where the zombies are some sort of elemental force? And we ended up coming around to that third option.

“We thought a player controlling the zombies wouldn’t enjoy the game. The whole point is that these creatures are mindless and uncontrollable so we felt it wouldn’t be a satisfying player experience. We also wanted a feeling that dealing with one zombie isn’t a big deal but as the numbers grow, the more terrifying they become. And we wanted there to be a *lot* of zombies! Obviously when people die they turn, so one of the first mechanics we introduced was that any time one of your units is destroyed, it becomes a zombie.

“Originally, any unit could be turned into zombies, but we actually found that this created too many! So we scaled the rule back to only include infantry. This created some interesting choices in how players take casualties and build their armies—sometimes they’ll choose to sacrifice that tank because losing an infantry will mean fighting more zombies.”

Random Attacks

In addition to having zombies rise from the ashes of combat, the game also uses cards to have a zombie appear in a random territory every turn. Van Essen says one of the bonuses of this, is that it forces players to fight over territories they would otherwise ignore.

“When you’ve been playing a game for a long time it’s easy to fall into familiar patterns of play, so this is a great way to make you look at *Axis & Allies* differently. One of the most exciting things about playing a game is starting out with a plan, then having to change that plan at the last minute because of new options.

“Zombies are a big potential drain on income so having them pop up all over the world makes the game a lot less linear. You have to change your plans and go where you wouldn’t normally go because the world is going to need cleaning up. That makes your priorities much more dynamic, which really challenges your brain.”

Given the threat they pose to both sides, it was important not to foster too much of a philosophy of ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’. Players still need to keep the spirit of the classic *Axis & Allies* game in their minds even as they strive to survive, with the zombies shuffling in as a wildcard.

“We talked about that a great deal,” Van Essen reveals. “We found during testing that having everyone united against the zombies was too far from the *Axis & Allies* game we know and love, but we did recognize that would be an impulse.

“It’s very possible for games to get out of control; to reach a point where the players are weak and the zombies are so strong that you just can’t fight it any more. Those games can get frustrating if they’re left to go on, so we created a zombie win condition. It is the zombie apocalypse after all!

“First we tried saying that if the zombies have taken over a certain value of territories, they win. Then we discovered that if certain players know they’re going to lose they simply abandon all their territories, make a lot of zombies and intentionally create that lose condition so that *everyone* loses.

“We didn’t like that but we did feel that a zombie win condition was still important. So instead of creating an ‘everybody loses’ scenario,

we chose to have the people who have created the best protected enclave of zombie-free territories be the winners.”

Zombie Combat

If you’re a war gaming fan, a devotee of *Axis & Allies* or simply excited by what you’ve read so far, chances are you can’t wait to send your armies into battle against the living dead. Van Essen admits that the team spent some time playing around with the rules regarding zombie attacks in order to arrive at the final mechanic for combat.

“The zombies have a die that has three blank sides—two sides that hit the attacker and one side that hits the defender. So the idea is that they’re dangerous to everybody, but more so to the attacker than the defender, as the attacker is more likely to be moving through open space,” says Van Essen.

“It was critical for players to have a way to fight the zombies, so whenever anyone rolls a six they automatically blow up a zombie by accident. The dice feature a lovely exploding zombie head to help players remember this.

“In addition, whenever you finish a battle against other players and there’s still zombies in that territory, you can choose to keep fighting to clear them out. And a single unit can hold the territory against any number of zombies. We decided that this made sense, as a unit will be a trained fighting force so they can erect defenses and hold out against the horde. But as soon as you lose that last unit, it becomes zombie-controlled territory and it’s much harder to get it back.”

Even when they don’t control an area, the zombie threat is still very real. Each player’s turn begins with a Zombie Phase that sees the undead try to attack. Van Essen says most of the time these attacks will be ineffectual, but every time a zombie die gets a hit on the defender it means the zombies broke through those defenses and got somebody.

“So you can only ignore them for so long,” he adds. “Zombies also create an interesting dynamic on the board. If there are a lot of zombies in a territory alongside your units, they provide a short-term bonus because they are more dangerous to an attacker than the

defender. But if you ignore them, eventually they will begin to wear you down.

“We had a lot of fun discovery moments as we watched player combat in the game. Sometimes a player would attack not because they were expecting to win but simply to leave a bunch of zombies in the territory to be someone else’s problem to deal with. That can also be fun.”

Core Rules

Thematically, the zombies have a great deal to add to the original setting and mechanics of *Axis & Allies*. The question is whether their inclusion will change the core rules and throw a monkey wrench in the works for long-term strategists.

“The core rules largely stay the same. We have a one-page, quick-start guide for people already familiar with *Axis & Allies* to help streamline a few things,” says Van Essen. “We did make a couple of changes to make play a little faster for new players because one of the things we’re hoping is that this will bring a whole new audience to the game.

“The game mechanics of *Axis & Allies* are not that complicated but they are presented on a board where there seems to be an infinite number of options, which can be overwhelming for new players. So we have an intro scenario set in 1939, and the goal is to get to an income value that’s commiserate with your income value at the start of the main game. We were trying to mimic the political pressures at the beginning of the World War II and direct the players towards similar historical play. However, the main point is to give new players a very narrow but meaningful set of choices that won’t overwhelm them. This quickly



(Select to view)

walks them through the progression of the game.

“*Axis & Allies* as a game sits between simulation and abstraction. There are people who really get into the details of tabletop warfare and love it, but the more rules you include, the fewer people can appreciate it—let alone access it.

“So we wanted enough points of realism to feel immersive without going so overboard in the quest for accuracy that you lose playability. Trying to find that sweet spot is a challenge. That’s really the thankless part of game design, hacking away at the rules with a machete until you get it right.”

“We also included lots of little Easter eggs for players to find just by looking at the board, rulebook and cards. We had the most amazing graphic artist on this game, Emi Tanji, and she added so many loving touches throughout, like blood spatters all over the money or making the board look chewed up. It’s a sight to behold and I know many players will appreciate it for that reason alone.”

Top Tips

Given his experience with the original *Axis & Allies* and his devotion to this new version, can Van Essen offer any tips for players looking to survive a conflict made even more dangerous by the addition of monsters?

“Respect the zombies, but don’t fear them,” he advises. “Sometimes they can be a tool and the game really revolves around who manages the zombies the best. Use them to help defend when you need it, clear them out when you don’t. A regimented and strategic player will benefit greatly if they can loosen their grip enough to appreciate that and learn to... well, embrace the chaos.”

TECHNOLOGY						
Z.I.B.R.A. SUITS INFANTRY		Z.A EXPLOSIVES ARTILLERY		CHAINSAW TANKS TANK		
AIR-D.O.T.S AIRCRAFT		DEADNAPPER CONVOYS TRANSPORT		ZOMBIE MIND CONTROL RAY ZOMBIE		
UNIT STATS	UNIT	COST	MOVE	ATTACK	DEFENSE	
	LAND UNITS					
	Infantry	3	1	1	2	
	Artillery	4	1	2	2	
	Tank	5	2	3	3	
	AIR UNITS					
	Fighter	10	4	3	4	
	Bomber	12	6	4	1	
	SEA UNITS					
	Submarine	6	2	2	1	
	Transport	7	2	-	-	
	Destroyer	8	2	2	2	
	Aircraft Carrier	14	2	1	2	
Battleship	20	2	4	4		
ORDER OF PLAY	1. Soviet Union					
	2. Germany					
	3. United Kingdom					
	4. Japan					
	5. United States					
	6. Check for Victory					
TURN SEQUENCE	1. Play a Zombie Card					
	2. Zombies Attack					
	3. Zombies Capture Territories					
	4. Combat Movement					
	5. Conduct Combat & Capture Territories					
	6. Noncombat Move					
	7. Purchase New Units					
	8. Collect Income					

“One of the challenges in early playtests was that players wouldn’t ‘clean up’ their own territories, and so then there would be more and more zombies until nobody had the resources to deal with them. So we decided anytime you capture a zombie-controlled territory, you recover the survivors—those people with guns who ran away and hid in the mountains—and draft them into your army.

“Giving players that infantry unit addressed a number of imbalances in the game, including how some players would strategically—and incorrectly I believe—neglect creating infantry because it could lead to the threat of more zombies.”

The zombie threat has also driven itself deep into the narrative of the game. Just as the maverick minds behind the wartime technology of WWII invented ever-more industrial ways to wage war, that thinking has been creatively turned against the undead.

“Historical technologies were always part of the game,” Van Essen says, “so we came up with zombie technologies like Chainsaw Tanks or Bite-proof Suits. My favorite trick is using the transports to pick up zombies and dump them somewhere else. They become someone else’s problem! It’s not the most powerful option but I think it’s the most fun.”

Quick or Slow?

The proliferation of zombies in modern culture over the past decade has spawned a number of different incarnations and reinterpretations of the classic monster. With so many new versions, we're curious as to what breed of zombie Van Essen sees inhabiting the world he's created?

“Oh, I'm a slow zombies man!” he says with a smile. “Those *World War Z* and *28 Days Later* zombies were fun, but I liked the idea that any one zombie is no problem. I'm not particularly athletic but I could take out a zombie or two.

“The very thing that makes zombies, zombies is that they never stop; there's wave after wave of them. You can fight for a while, but then you have to run. On a zombie level that's what I love.”

“We also felt that a lot of gamers who loved the zombie genre but had never experienced *Axis & Allies* would be brought into the game, and we actually designed the product with that in mind.

“By adding a new twist to the game we can bring players something fresh; a new addition to a genre that I've been playing for thirty years! I love having a system I've been immersed in my whole life suddenly bring in an element that will generate new strategies and surprises. It generates a totally new gameplay experience.”

To find out more about *Axis & Allies & Zombies* visit the [Avalon Hill website](#) or [preorder the game](#) ahead of its release on **26 October 2018.**

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BEHIND THE SCREENS

Learning with D&D

In issue 21, we asked experts running gaming clubs to share their invaluable advice on adding younger players to their D&D games. This issue, Speech and Language Pathologist **Carey Olsen Findley** explains how playing Dungeons & Dragons can aid the development of children with learning difficulties.

By Sam Hanshaw

In January 2018 I was sitting in a sixth-grade classroom helping a couple of students I knew really well organize their thoughts for a writing assignment and they started talking about *Stranger Things*. I had seen the show and loved it and I thought, “I can use this.”

When we had finished discussing the character analysis essay they began talking about all these theories they had about the show. It was amazing to hear because it was the most complex conversation about plot I’d ever heard them have. They were connecting everything to the game the characters play, so I told them, “You know that game they’re playing with the dice, that’s a real game. People actually play that.” And they both got really excited.

A bunch of my longtime friends from high school played Dungeons & Dragons but I had never played myself. They had always kept it as their thing and we didn't talk about it when we were all together. I told these students about my friends, and said I would ask them how hard it is to play so that maybe we could have a game. They were so excited that when I got home I texted my friend Jason and said, "I have some questions for you about D&D." He responded straight away and his message simply said, "I have been waiting for this text literally my entire life."



Carey Olsen Findlay with her students (Select to view)

I started talking to him and I bought a *Starter Set* at a local gaming shop. When I first opened the book I was a little overwhelmed, but over the course of the next two school days I explained what I'd found out to those kids. I realized we could play D&D if we had three or four people but they would need to turn up regularly, probably at lunch and lunch recess. They talked to their friends and got on board. One of them watched a ton of YouTube videos of people playing D&D and got super-excited.

Over the weekend Jason came up and bought me the *Player's Handbook*, a battle mat, and a bunch of minis and sat down to give me a crash course in how to run a campaign. Then every Monday and Wednesday, this group of kids came in for lunch and lunch recess. I ran a campaign for them and when that was done one of the students made his own and we finished out the rest of the school year playing that.

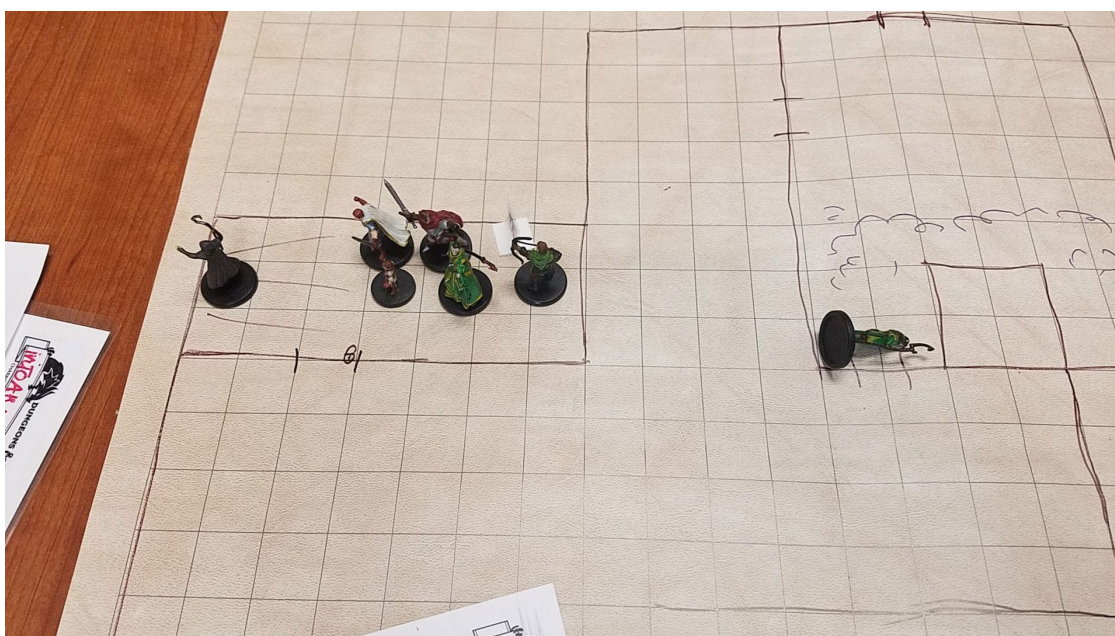
This wasn't my job and most of these students weren't on my case load but it was so much fun for me to go home and plan and think, "Gosh, what have I been missing out on." It was a really good time.

Game Development

That group of mostly general education kids gave me the platform to learn how to use D&D. I was then able to experiment with other groups. The version of the game we play is modified and I'm excited to develop that aspect more next year. I made it non-combat focused because I am using time from their individualized education program to run the game.

I have a student I see one-on-one who is in a class for emotional and behavioral disorders and I started playing the modified version with him. Then I opened it up to two groups of second-grade students who have language impairment, as well as a fifth-grade social skills group.

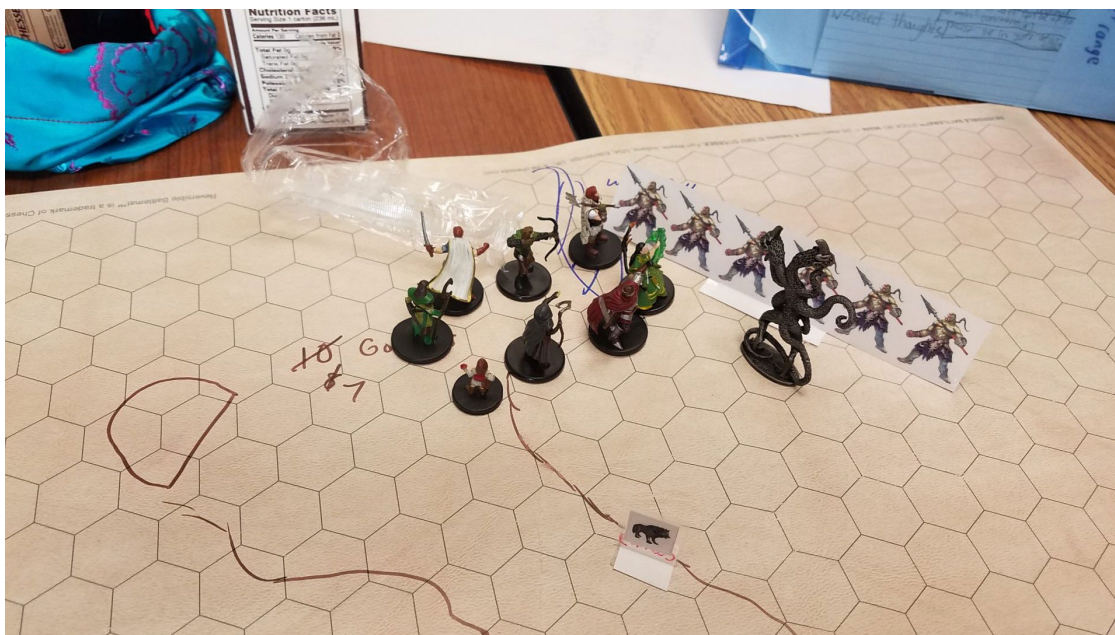
The social skills group is made up of four boys: two have diagnoses on the autism spectrum and the other two have social communication challenges. They're really smart kids but they're struggling socially. I picked a bizarre challenge: that all the marshmallows in the world are melted and we have to think about why that is and how we bring them back into the world.



I planned out a mansion in excruciating detail, they spent the whole session busting through a wall to nowhere! (Select to view)

They took that and ran with it. I gave them each a simplified character sheet and they made whatever characters came to their minds. We had an invisible donkey, a human-sized dog that rode a pizza delivery bike and a magic-using skeleton who could only use his powers when he had buried himself underground. One of the kids has very rigid thinking and he was just playing **Yoshi**. He based everything he did on what that character can do. That was our little team.

I made up bizarre monsters for them to encounter—including a giant donut—and gave these creatures behavioral attributes the students themselves need to work on. But I never called out any of these behaviors in real life. I would just describe them and the players could use their characters' actions to give suggestions or do something to change the feelings or behavior of the monster they were encountering. The idea was to get it to have more expected behaviors or understand how it was impacting other people's feelings.



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There was obviously a lot of perspective taking, but they started to get it. If I used a really specific example of a behavior, I'd hear one of my students say, "Oh, I do that!" Then they would pause and think about it. And we could explore it: "Yes, you do that. How do you think other people feel when you do that?" It was really cool to see them realize that perspective and have them understand that their

behaviors and their words impact other people.

I was still having some problems with distracting behaviors. There was a lot of interrupting, talking over each other and blurting things out. They would also get stuck in their own rigid thinking and have trouble integrating a storyline. And if another kid didn't like one of their ideas they would get into an argument.

I needed a way to explain that as the player their behaviors could impact both the game and what was happening in real life too.

Weird Thoughts Fairy

Before we started using D&D, we had a whole system of vocabulary for talking about behaviors. One of the phrases we use to describe disruptive or distracting behavior in the group is, "I just saw you do this and that gave me weird thoughts." That takes the emotion out of it. By telling them other people are going to have weird thoughts when they do that, we're not blaming them for it. So the whole group started off in a safe, trusting environment and I ended up creating a different kind of character.

She was named the Weird Thoughts Fairy. If there's an unexpected behavior happening in real life, she can go between real life and the game and give or take things away from the characters. So if someone's interrupting or getting really upset about a small problem, I can describe how the Weird Thoughts Fairy is forming and she's noticing this is happening. That took it away from me being the teacher telling them they are overreacting. I say, "This is what I'm noticing and the Weird Thoughts Fairy goes into the game and now your strength is decreased."

That made them aware of their behavior in real life more quickly than anything else I've tried. It was so successful it got to the point where the Weird Thoughts Fairy didn't have to do anything. I would just tell them that she was forming and they would stop what they were doing and change their behavior.

On the positive side, if the Weird Thoughts Fairy notices someone has stopped and calmed themselves down and used words to solve a problem then she can appear in the game and say, "What does your

character want? Were you hoping to find another spell? Do you want your pizza delivery bike to go faster?" That was really helpful too.

Language Barriers

The two second-graders I work with on language impairment made up another small group. Their difficulties are centered on language organization, which can lead to a number of issues. They use a lot of visual material to carry out literacy assignments other students take for granted and that can be cumbersome.

They also struggle to describe events that have happened, which can affect conversations with friends or even going home and telling their mom how school was. And if they have a problem with another student, it can be a long, drawn-out process to try to figure that out.

They are verbal kids, but as they get older and those things become more complex, the more they struggle. I had taught them some vocabulary so they knew how to discuss a story and understood what a character and a setting were. But they would need a lot of visuals to be able to tell a story on their own.

When they got to make characters using the modified sheets, we had an invisible squirrel and a regular old T-rex called Rex.

One of the kids loves dinosaurs and knows all these facts about them. He has the kind of rigid thinking that says, "This is what a T-rex can do and that's all a T-rex can do and that's the end of it." When I had them roll the dice to determine what their character's Strength, Intelligence and Dexterity were, the kid who was stuck on the T-rex having small arms and not being able to do anything happened to roll a really high Dexterity. I tried to explain that this would mean his T-rex can somehow make a paper airplane. And he's like, "No! A T-rex cannot make a paper airplane." "But your Dexterity is really high," I say, "so yes you can. You have to imagine that."

Even at that very early stage I understood that he was having a verbal debate with me and backing up his opinion with facts. That's something I would have struggled to get him to do before. Finally, after acting it out in my office, he agrees that Rex can make a paper airplane.

So Rex and Invisible Squirrel went on some adventures. For these players it was all about building a narrative, so I allowed the characters to do anything they wanted to do. Invisible Squirrel wanted to find a bird she could fly on, so she had to roll to make a bird call and see if that would entice one in. When that didn't work, she had to problem solve around the issue and learn how to make a better bird call.

Increasingly, when they got a low roll on the dice for anything they wanted to try, they would have to figure out a problem and solution. This created an episode in their longer narrative but they also had to keep in mind what the main goal was: to find the spell that would allow Invisible Squirrel to go back and forth being invisible and visible.

Suddenly these kids who struggle to have a context that makes sense to them, had one. It was as if rolling the dice and seeing the number and realizing how that would impact on events somehow made them able to keep it all in their minds. They also cared so much about their characters that they could remember what was happening from week to week even if I didn't keep perfect notes! They could recount what had happened and that's something they couldn't do at the beginning of the year.

At the end of the campaign, when they had solved the problem, I had them tell me the story and I typed it up and they drew pictures. Until that moment, all I had done was sketch out a rudimentary map on a piece of paper and they hadn't needed the same level of visual organization they usually required. They were able to imagine the adventure and make it real enough that they could keep it in their minds.

The mom of the Invisible Squirrel student sent me an email one day out of the blue and said, "I don't know what you're doing but my daughter just told me about her day in complete sentences. She strung them all together and created something that made sense and I know how her day was at school. So whatever it is you're doing, it's working."

Top Tips

If there anything I would do differently it would be to worry less about the complexity of the game. At the beginning when I was learning how to play I was hung up on every little detail and that can bog play down. Every time I spoke to my friend Jason, he would remind me, “You’re the DM, they do what you say.” When I gave myself permission to stop worrying about what I didn’t know and be a little more fluid, I freed myself from that.

Initially, I would also worry about how fun it would be for the students, but I was really overthinking that. When they encountered a nothic I worried that this monster is so scary and complicated that I wouldn’t be able to describe it in a way that would get that fear across. Until I realized that you have to think like a kid. So when I tell them they hear a creepy voice in their head and I think that sounds oversimplified and not nearly cool enough, their reaction is to grab their heads and spin around. And then you realize how engaged they are with this.

Once you see that, you know all you have to do is be in the game to the same level and those self-critical fears will fade away. An adult has to be able to let go and be silly with it. It’s about changing your mentality from teaching students something to playing the game with them and being on their level.

Transferable Skills

Not that they aren’t learning the whole time they are playing. It’s important to realize that the skills you need to play D&D are the same skills you need to do just about anything else. The things that were getting in the way of the social skills group were being upset and not being able to express their emotions, but they had to master that in order to participate in the game. The great thing is they don’t even know they’re working on this in real life while they are playing the game.

When one of the kids asked me if we were going to be playing again next year, I said, “Yes. It’s really fun and you’re all learning a lot.” He gave me this look and said, “No, we’re just playing a game. We haven’t learned anything.” And coming from a place of trust where I could tell him this, I was immediately able to give him an example.

Previously if someone interrupted him he would take it really personally and shut down for the rest of that session. So I asked him what happens now when he gets interrupted and he thinks about it and says, “Oh, that hasn’t happened for a while has it?”

There’s also something magical about the dice and getting an idea rejected. Instead of saying, “No, that won’t work,” I can say, “You can try but it is a DC 18.” And they’re OK with that because it’s up to the dice. So instead of being really disappointed and feeling rejected—even though they still might have those feelings—they are disappointed in the dice roll and it’s out of their hands.

That’s how it is in life, often things are out of your control. It feels as if when they roll the dice and they’re hoping for something and it doesn’t happen, they can handle that disappointment a lot easier. Not all adults can do that so they’re learning some really complex skills.

D&D also teaches the language skills they need for real life. Being able to explain why they need something or describe something in detail or retell what happened are important skills. My hope is that when they’re using these skills in a game setting it feels more real than if we were doing an exercise in school. And if it feels that way it might sink into their brains in a different way. I’m excited to see where it goes.

Carey Olson Findley, MS, CCC-SLP is a Speech-Language Pathologist for the Highline School District in the Seattle area. She works in general education from kindergarten through sixth grade, with students who display everything from articulation disorders to autism.

BACK TO TOP

The Best of the DMs Guild

DMs Guild Adept Shawn Merwin chats with creator Dan Dillon about his experiences in the industry and highlights other material from contributors to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*.



The upcoming release of *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* brings with it a return to the mega-dungeon. Many of the original adventures released for D&D firmly set the game's action in these odd underground complexes: *Tomb of Horrors*, *White Plume Mountain*, *Descent into the Depths of the Earth*, *Village of Hommlet*, and countless others.

Undermountain, the setting for the new release, is the ultimate dungeon. This month we look at work on the DMs Guild created by the people who brought us this new iteration of the famous graveyard

for adventures.

Dan Dillon discusses his experiences in the RPG industry, his joy at contributing to an official Wizards of the Coast product, and his fascination with genies.

Tell us how you got started with D&D, and what it was about the game that spoke to you?

My introduction was lucky happenstance. A family friend who was into RPGs was cleaning off his shelves, and he gave me a short stack of books including all three AD&D core books, *Unearthed Arcana*, *Oriental Adventures*, as well as a *Shadowrun* core rulebook. I was immediately taken with the D&D cover art, and particularly the creature art in the *Monster Manual*. I loved stories and creatures, so it sang to me right away. I spent the next few years reading through the books, drawing dungeons on graph paper and populating them with monsters—devils were my favorite, particularly the archdevils—and making characters. I was in third grade at the time, so I didn't have the best grasp of self-taught character creation.

Not too long after that I met other people who played D&D. Second edition was out, and I picked up a set of books and we started playing the game in earnest. I'd developed a love of Greek mythology by then so my head was fully immersed in all things fantastic. I realize now I was very fortunate in that I was surrounded by people who were either into D&D themselves or at least understood that it was a fun pastime. My first Scoutmasters were the former, my parents the latter.



Dan Dillon (and friend)

You contributed to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*. What was it like to work on an official D&D product?

Working on *Mad Mage* was such a great experience. I've worked for one other large RPG company so I wasn't going in completely cold. Even still I wasn't sure what to expect and it was much more

personal than I imagined. Another designer—the incomparable James Introcaso—was brought in at the same time and we got together with Chris Perkins on a video call, which was delightful. We got to talk about the project and our parts in it, and ways that the presentation of *Mad Mage* would be different from previous fifth edition products.

Not too long after that I met other people who played D&D. Second edition was out, and I picked up a set of books and we started playing the game in earnest. I'd developed a love of Greek mythology by then so my head was fully immersed in all things fantastic. I realize now I was very fortunate in that I was surrounded by people who were either into D&D themselves or at least understood that it was a fun pastime. My first Scoutmasters were the former, my parents the latter.

You contributed to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage*. What was it like to work on an official D&D product?

Working on *Mad Mage* was such a great experience. I've worked for one other large RPG company so I wasn't going in completely cold. Even still I wasn't sure what to expect and it was much more personal than I imagined. Another designer—the incomparable James Introcaso—was brought in at the same time and we got together with Chris Perkins on a video call, which was delightful. We got to talk about the project and our parts in it, and ways that the presentation of *Mad Mage* would be different from previous fifth edition products.



[More Info](#)

Once I started, it was an interesting contrast of tight boundaries and creative freedom. My little slice of Undermountain is Shadowdusk Hold, level 22, and that's one of the levels which has never been fully detailed before. That was very exciting, to start with a few bits of lore and create a story for something that's been drifting through D&D for decades. There were still those tight boundaries: I had strict budgets for treasure and experience points, including a few hard

requirements. It was an interesting challenge to design tier-four adventure content using a list of monsters that are, for the most part, much lower level. I leaned hard on the story of Shadowdusk Hold and the degenerate family that lives there, to build memorable encounters with some interesting roleplay and plot hooks.

Additionally, there is so much material in Undermountain and only so many pages in a D&D book. *Dungeon of the Mad Mage* moves away from the more traditional use of boxed-text and lengthy descriptions, instead utilizing a concise set of bullet points to provide important information and short descriptions to the DM at a glance. It's an interesting new method and I'm excited to see what the fans think.

What are some of the joys and challenges of working as a freelancer in the RPG industry?

I can't overstate how amazing it is to get to contribute material to the game I've loved since I was a kid. That's more joy than I know what to do with right there. But as a long-time DM I've done quite a bit of custom design over the years and I love getting to collaborate with other creators and publishers. My favorite, though, is talking to people who've read and used material I've worked on. It's become one of the best parts of conventions for me and is a great motivator to get me volunteering at publishers' booths.

On the flip side, the challenges are many. There's a certain degree of 'anything goes' when you're designing things for your own use, and in a lot of ways that doesn't fly when you're writing for publication. When people are paying for your material, you have a responsibility to provide a tighter level of quality. That's what makes playtests so important: the stakes are higher. Some of the things I've produced that don't hit the level of quality I strive for still haunt me, and I constantly entertain working up revisions for them. It's sometimes hard to let that go.

As a creator, it's easy to get too precious about the things you write and think of them as 'yours'. If you're hired to write something on behalf of someone else it belongs to your employer, so you need to make sure you're delivering the product you're hired to produce.

The biggest challenge in freelancing is economics. It's a difficult gig if you don't have a day job. The hustle I've seen in the few people

who successfully freelance full time is nothing short of inspiring.

You created *Genies Great and Small: 21 New Genies of Zakhara*. What is it about genies that is so fascinating?

I'm a massive Al-Qadim fan from way back, so the DMs Guild opened the door to let me bring my love of that setting together with my love of fifth edition. Genies are an iconic creature from myth and legend and D&D has its indelible versions of them that we know and love. Zakhara, however, had the concept of 'tasked' genies. These were versions of genies summoned and set to one type of task so often or for so long that they changed fundamentally into a form more suited to that task.

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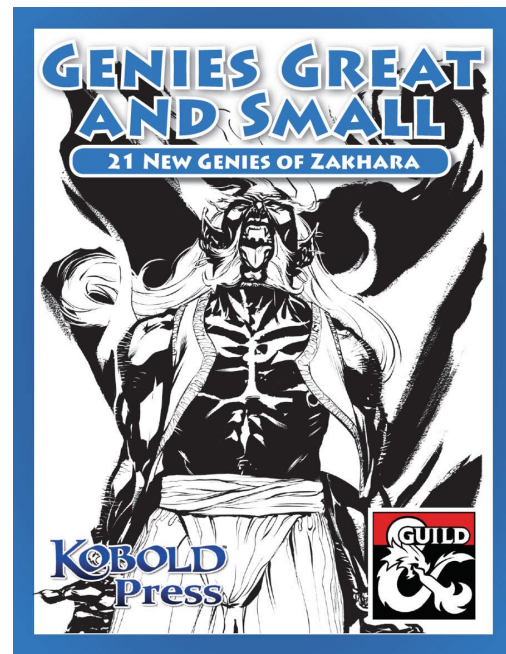
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It added wonderful flavor to the adventures setting, and porting those concepts forward and designing them for fifth edition was a blast. I also got to flex my creative muscles and design some new versions of 'true' genies that hit some important themes both of



genies and their servitude, and of life and survival in desert settings. The fact that I got to write these for Wolfgang Baur, who designed material for the original Al-Qadim setting including several tasked genies, was icing on an already glorious cake.

Genies Great and Small: 21 New Genies of Zakhara by Dan Dillon costs \$4.99 (PDF) and \$9.99 (softcover color book) on the DMs Guild.

Depths of Undermountain

Undermountain has been *the* iconic mega-dungeon of D&D since its original release in *The Ruins of Undermountain* in 1991. Every edition of Dungeons & Dragons has revisited, expanded, and deepened its lore and appeal for gamers.

One of the main draws of Undermountain is its size—and, by extension, its invitation to Dungeon Masters to fill in the blanks on the map with their own creative stories and monsters.

One outstanding related product on the DM's Guild is *Depths of Undermountain* by Dave Coulson. This 20-page product sells for \$2.99 and contains a succinct primer on the history of Undermountain, its relationship to the Yawning Portal tavern, random encounters and dungeon dressings, and a short adventure to introduce characters to the Well, the most-explored area of the dungeon.

While the product is short and the art limited to a hand-drawn map of the adventure area, it is a good representation of the spirit that the DM's Guild was founded on: create something interesting to share

with the D&D community!

[Learn More](#)

Design Thought: Mega-Dungeons

The most challenging part of running adventures in a mega-dungeon is not what happens in the dungeon itself, but how to handle the game when the characters need to leave. What is nearby? What challenges do the characters face when they are out of the dungeon? What happens in the dungeon while they are gone? How do events externally and events in the dungeon play off each other?

Keep these questions in mind as you create your own Undermountain encounters and adventures. Remember that sometimes the challenges of civilization can be just as dangerous and complicated as the challenges of the dungeon.

Other Products

Riddle of the Raven Queen **By Claire Hoffman, James** **Introcaso, Greg Marks, Travis** **Woodall**

Price: \$4.99

Get a sneak peek at content created by four of the talented freelancers who contributed to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* in this one product. *Riddle of the Raven Queen's* 35 pages includes an eight to twelve-hour adventure, one new monster, and one new magic item. The adventure for eighth-level characters investigates the contentious relationship between moon elves, wood elves, drow, and shadar-kai, taking the characters from the peaceful sylvan vales of Faerûn into the Shadowfell itself. Rich Lescouflair's art and layout place it at the high end of the DMs Guild spectrum, rivaling official



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products.

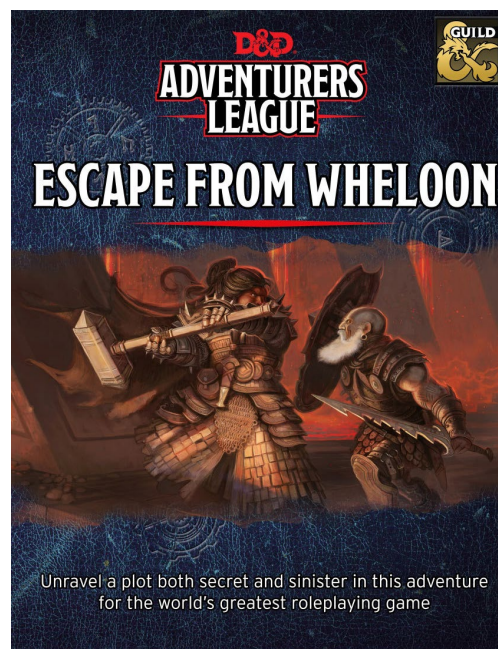
[Learn More](#)

Escape from Wheloon

By Alan Patrick

Price: \$4.95

Get a sneak peek at content created by four of the talented freelancers who contributed to *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* in this one product. *Riddle of the Raven Queen's* 35 pages includes an eight to twelve-hour adventure, one new monster, and one new magic item. The adventure for eighth-level characters investigates the contentious relationship between moon elves, wood elves, drow, and shadar-kai, taking the characters from the peaceful sylvan vales of Faerûn into the Shadowfell itself. Rich Lescouflair's art and layout place it at the high end of the DMs Guild spectrum, rivaling official products.



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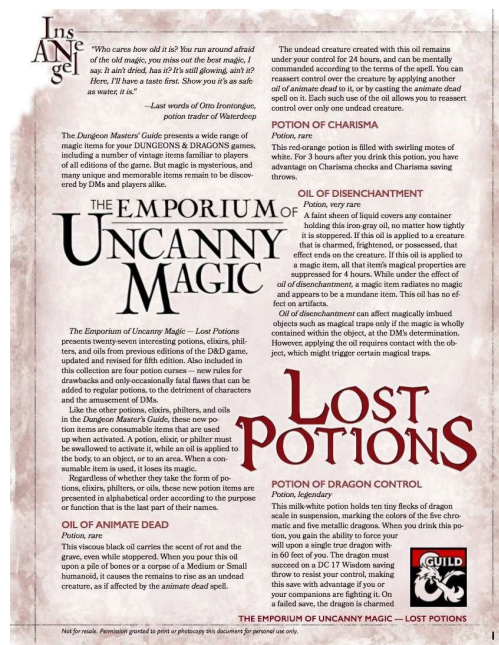
The Emporium of Uncanny

Magic – Lost Potions

By Scott Fitzgerald Gray

Price: \$1.99

Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage contributor Alan Patrick's most recent DMs Guild work is *Escape from Wheloon*, a four-hour adventure for low-level characters. It includes four pre-generated characters whose backgrounds and



stories mesh with the plot, although any characters can be used to play the adventure.

Wheloon is a unique locale: a prison-city in Cormyr that houses the dregs of society, with no hope of escape. The adventure’s design allows characters to play as falsely accused criminals banished to Wheloon, mercenaries sent in to clean up the streets, or actual criminals fending for themselves in this deadly place.

(Select to view)

[Learn More](#)

While you are exploring the wonderful and terrible tunnels of the Archmage Halaster Blackcloak, you are going to need lots of potions. Scott Fitzgerald Gray, an editor on *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* and *Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage* (as well as *Dragon+* content!), provides 27 potions from previous editions of the game, updated to fifth edition. Favorites like *potion of rainbow hues* and *oil of sweet water* are included. Gray also adds sections on potion curses, listing baleful side effects that some mages and alchemists weave into their potions. They’re sure to add tension and drama to a campaign where players might be too quick to drink any old thing they find lying around a damp, dangerous dungeon.

Game designer and editor Shawn Merwin’s professional work on Dungeons & Dragons has ranged from third to fifth edition, showing up in sourcebooks, adventures, articles, and Organized Play administration. He wrote the 5e Undermountain adventure,

Halaster's Maze of Madness , has written adventures for the D&D Adventurers League, and manages convention-created content for Baldman Games.



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Unearthed Arcana: Dragonmarks

Discussing the social, political and practical aspects of dragonmarks in the world of Eberron.

Keith Baker with Ruty Rutenberg and Ben Petrisor



Playtest Material

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game development and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

his month Unearthed Arcana presents a new playtest option for the world of Eberron—and beyond.

T

Dragonmarks are mystical sigils that appear on the skin and enhance the bearer's ability to perform certain tasks. The bearer of the mark rolls a d4 Intuition die when performing an ability check associated with the mark and adds that roll to the total.

As dragonmarked characters grow in level they can take the Greater Dragonmark feat to reflect the mark's growing power or choose the Aberrant Dragonmark feat to gain limited but dangerous magical abilities.

Access the full details of the rules for dragonmarks by downloading the PDF.

[Download PDF](#)

A survey on these options will appear on the D&D website. Please try them out and let us know what you think.

For more information on the world of Eberron, Keith Baker has unleashed his creation upon the DMs Guild in the form of the Wayfarer's Guide to Eberron .

To see the full treasure trove of Unearthed Arcana articles, covering new classes and feats, conversions of rules from previous editions, and much more, visit the archive here.

Have a request for Unearthed Arcana? Follow [@mikemearls](#) on Twitter and let him know.

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Dragon Classic

Honestly, there's so much Halloween goodness from the pages of *Dragon Magazine* that it's hard not to load up this issue's "Classics" section with a bit more than usual. So how do we possibly narrow down our favorites? We can't. But we can at least organize a few pieces together, collecting a set of articles by Tom Moldvay—legendary designer, among a great many things, of such adventures as *X1: The Isle of Dread*, one of the key influences on last year's *Tomb of Annihilation*.

As an added bonus, each October issue also featured a "holiday greeting" page, which we've included as downloads below. Enjoy!

Tom Moldvay

Dragon #126: Hearts of Darkness.

Tom Moldvay starts his series with this dive into perhaps the most classic horror creatures of all time—the vampire. Here, he looks at vampires of myth and legend as well mass media, from *Dracula* to *Ch'ing Shih*. Count Strahd would be pleased.

[DOWNLOAD](#)



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Dragon #138: The Ungrateful Dead.

Here, three more classical undead are considered: skeletons, zombies, and ghouls. As Tom explains, he defines “classical” as having three things in common: 1) By all rights, such creatures should be dead; 2) Most such creatures have some sort of physical form; and 3) Most such creatures are hopelessly evil and attack living beings on sight.

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Dragon #162: Out of the Shadows.

In a bit of old school “gotcha” fashion, Tom explains that “In underground dungeons lit by torchlight, there will always be shadows. Why not have some of

the shadows attack the characters every once in a while? A monster could thus be hidden in a room, in plain sight, to give characters an occasional nasty surprise.”

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Dragon #198: Beyond the Grave.

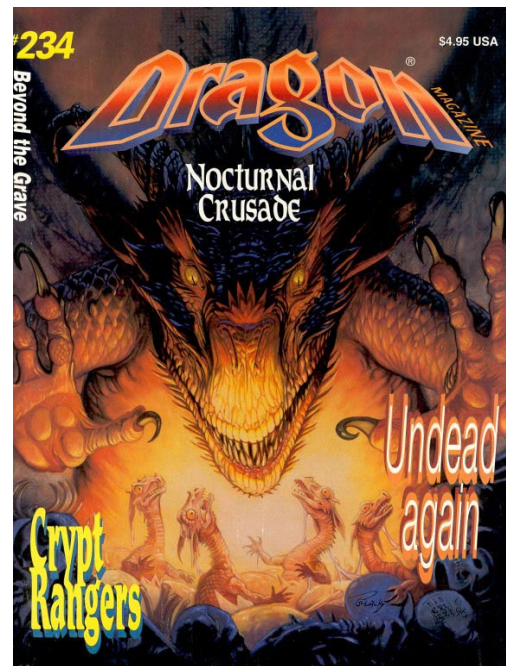
The series wraps up with legends of the wight, wraith, and mummy. As he does throughout the series, Tom examines the etymology of these monsters, dives into their historical background, and provides stats for each. And really, how can you not want to include a “super-mummy” in your next game?

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Further Material

Dragon #234: Dracoliches

This issue also features a couple of notable monsters—there’s a look at the crawling claw, for fans of *Dice, Camera, Action!* And also, the pennangalan, new versions of which are features in this issue’s cartoon section. However, it’s the *Wyrm of the North* section by Ed Greenwood that we wanted to especially call out. We’ve featured



(Select to view)

Dragotha in a previous D&D Classics column, back in *Dragon*+ 12 (Feb 2017). Here now is Daurgothoth, the “Creeping Doom”!

[DOWNLOAD DRAGOTHA](#)

[DOWNLOAD DAURGOTHOTH](#)

Lycanthropes

Outside of *Dragon Magazine*, there’s of course plenty of material to be mined from the first edition *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, on just about any subject (like the *Junior Woodchuck’s Guidebook*), including playing as monstrous characters. It’s fascinating that even in those earlier years of the game the creators felt it necessary to write: “There have been many different approaches to the disease of lycanthropy. Many are too complicated to understand or are structured so poorly that the werereature dominates the game.”

I suppose we all have our own Appendix N: Inspirational and Educational Reading. The *DMG* will always remain in mine, as one of my favorite books (not just gaming book). Every page certainly could inspire its own blog entry; but for now, we’ll concentrate on pgs. 22-23. For example, maybe you already knew that characters suffering damage over 50 per cent of their hit points risk contracting lycanthropy. But in addition to full moons, did you know that stress during combat can also cause release of the werereature? Or that

wearing armor during this change damages them as they burst out of its straps?

[DOWNLOAD](#)

Death House

Finally, we wanted to call back to this mini-adventure preview in *Dragon+ #6* (Feb 2016). Death House served as a lead-in to the *Curse of Strahd* campaign but also works as a Halloween-themed one-shot. In it, ‘Death House’ refers to an old row house in the village of Barovia. The house has been burned to the ground many times, only to rise from the ashes time and again—by its own will or that of Strahd. Locals give the building a wide berth for fear of antagonizing the evil spirits believed to haunt it.

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UNEARTHED ARCANA

Dragonmarks

This document presents dragonmarks, a playtest option from the D&D world of Eberron that can be incorporated when you choose your character's race. For more information about Eberron, see the *Wayfinder's Guide to Eberron*, available on the Dungeon Master's Guild (DMsGuild.com).

This Is Playtest Content

The material here is presented for playtesting and to spark your imagination. These game mechanics are in draft form, usable in your campaign but not refined by final game design and editing. They aren't officially part of the game and aren't permitted in D&D Adventurers League events.

If we decide to make this material official, it will be refined based on your feedback, and then it will appear in a D&D book.

A dragonmark is a mystic sigil that appears on the skin. The mark is a source of mystical power and enhances the bearer's ability to perform certain tasks. In Eberron, each mark is tied to specific bloodlines. The families that carry these marks joined together to form the Dragonmarked Houses, powerful forces that dominate different industries. Not every member of a given family possesses a dragonmark; conversely, merely possessing a dragonmark does not grant special status within the house. In creating a dragonmarked character, your background can help to establish your relationship to the house. A dragonmarked noble may be part of the ruling family. A guild artisan or entertainer can work in one of the house guilds. A criminal may have been exiled from their house, while an urchin could be an orphan who never knew they had a tie to one of the dragonmarked families.

Creating a Dragonmarked Character

Dragonmarks are associated with race and are represented by a combination of variant races and subraces.

- For humans, a dragonmark is a variant race that replaces the normal traits associated with those races.
- For half-elves and half-orcs, a dragonmark is a variant race. You keep some of the standard half-elf traits and replace others with the traits associated with your mark.
- For dwarves, elves, gnomes, and halflings, the dragonmark replaces your subrace. So, if you're making an elf character, you can choose to take the Mark of Shadow instead of being a wood elf or high elf.

There are two additional options related to dragonmarks. As your dragonmarked character grows in level, you can take the Greater Dragonmark feat to reflect the growing power of your dragonmark. Alternatively, the Aberrant Dragonmark feat grants limited but dangerous magical abilities. Aberrant dragonmarks aren't tied to the dragonmark houses and can be taken by any character.

Intuition Dice

A dragonmark improves your ability to perform a specific type of task. The Mark of Finding sharpens your senses and improves your perception, while the Mark of Making guides your hands when you work with artisan's tools.

Each dragonmark has a trait that allows you to roll an **Intuition die**, a d4, when you perform an ability check with a particular skill or tool. You add the number rolled to the ability check. You don't have to be proficient with the skill or tool to gain this benefit.

Feats, magic items, and other features may improve your Intuition die. This increases the type of die you roll by one size (d6, d8, d10) to a maximum of a d10. You can only roll one Intuition die for a check; if you receive Intuition dice from multiple sources, increase one die by one type and roll that one.

For example, if a dragonmarked trait and feat both grant intuition with Dexterity (Stealth) checks, you roll a d6, instead of a d4. Three instances would increase your Intuition Die to a d8, and so on.

Dragonmark Appearance

A dragonmark is a distinctive symbol that appears on the skin. There are twelve known dragonmarks, each unique in design and power. A dragonmark can appear on any part of the body. One half-elf could have the Mark of Detection across an eye, while another has it in the palm of their hand. Dragonmarks are painted in vivid shades of blue and purple and seem to shimmer or even move slightly. When used, they grow warm to the touch and may glow (though this doesn't produce useful illumination). A dragonmark can't be removed—even if a limb bearing a dragonmark is cut away, the mark eventually manifests on another part of the bearer's body. All dragonmarks share the same initial appearance but a dragonmark can grow in size and complexity if a character takes the *Greater Dragonmark* feat or if the mark is tied to class abilities.

While dragonmarks share the same general appearance, your dragonmark could have a unique quality. If you'd like to explore this, roll on the Dragonmark Quirks table.

Dragonmark Quirks

1d6	Quirk
1	Your dragonmark is unusually small or remarkably large.
2	Your dragonmark slowly moves around your body.
3	Your dragonmark glows dramatically when you use it.
4	Your dragonmark tingles when you're near someone with the same mark.
5	Your dragonmark tickles when you use it.

- 6 Your dragonmark is an unusual color but a normal shape.

The Mark of Detection

The Mark of Detection is an inquisitive's dream. It sharpens powers of observation and intuition, allowing the bearer to draw connections and interpret clues others might miss. By actively drawing on its powers, the bearer can detect poisons and study the energies of magic.

Mark of Detection Traits

The Mark of Detection manifests exclusively on half-elves. If your character has the Mark of Detection, these traits replace the half-elf's Ability Score Increase, Skill Versatility, and Languages given in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence and Charisma scores both increase by 1. In addition, one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Deductive Intuition. When you make an Intelligence (Investigation) or Wisdom (Insight) check, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Sense Threats. You can cast the *detect magic* and *detect poison and disease* spells, but only as rituals. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and Elvish.

The Mark of Finding

The Mark of Finding sharpens the senses of those who carry it, guiding the hunter to their prey. In Eberron, it first appeared in the Shadow Marches, where clan hunters used it to find their prey. The mark helped unite humans and orcs in the Marches and brought House Tharashk to the Five Nations.

Mark of Finding Traits

The Mark of Finding only manifests on half-orcs. If your character has the Mark of Finding, these traits replace the Ability Score Increase, Menacing, Relentless Endurance, and Savage Attacks given in the *Player's Handbook*. Despite

their orcish blood, heirs of the Mark of Finding often resemble their human parents in appearance and temperament. When you create your character, decide if the signs of your orcish ancestry are obvious or subtle.

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength and Wisdom scores both increase by 1. In addition, one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Hunter's Intuition. Your mark sharpens your senses and helps you find your prey. When you make a Wisdom (Perception) or Wisdom (Survival) check, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Imprint Prey. As a bonus action, choose one creature you can see within 30 feet of you. The target is imprinted in your mind until it dies or you use this trait again. Alternatively, you can imprint a creature as your quarry whenever you succeed on a Wisdom (Survival) check to track it. When you are tracking your quarry, double the result of your Intuition die. When your quarry is within 60 feet of you, you have a general sense of its location. Your attacks against it ignore half cover. If you can't see the target when you attack it, your inability to see it doesn't impose disadvantage on the attack roll. Likewise, your quarry doesn't gain advantage on attack rolls against you due to being hidden or invisible. Once you use this trait, you cannot use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Nature's Voice. When you reach 3rd level you gain the ability to cast *locate animals or plants*, but only as a ritual.

The Mark of Handling

The Mark of Handling gives its bearer a primal connection to beasts and the natural world, granting the power to calm and coax. This extends beyond purely natural animals; the mark allows its bearer to guide a hippogriff as easily as a horse.

Mark of Handling Traits

The Mark of Handling only manifests on humans. If your character has the Mark of Handling, these traits replace the human's Ability Score Increase trait given in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity and Wisdom scores both increase by 1. In addition, one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Wild Intuition. When you make a Wisdom (Animal Handling) or Intelligence (Nature) check, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Expert Handling. You can use the Help action to aid an ally animal companion or mount within 30 feet of you, rather than 5 feet of you.

Primal Connection. You can cast *animal friendship* once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a short or long rest. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for this spell.

The Bigger They Are. When you cast a spell that affects only beasts, it also affects monstrosities with an Intelligence score of 3 or lower.

The Mark of Healing

A halfling with the Mark of Healing can save a life with a touch, restoring vitality and the will to live. When dealing with mundane medicine, the mark helps its bearer sense the nature of maladies and afflictions and find the best solution. When enhanced by dragonshard focus items, the mark can even draw the dead back to life.

Mark of Healing Traits

The Mark of Healing manifests exclusively on halflings. If your character has the Mark of Healing, this is your halfling subrace.

Ability Score Increase. Your Wisdom score increases by 1.

Medical Intuition. When you make a Wisdom (Medicine) check, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Healing Touch. As an action, you can draw power from your dragonmark to spend one of your Hit Dice and revitalize yourself or a creature you touch. Roll the die, add your Wisdom modifier, and the creature regains a number of hit points equal to the total. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Jorasco's Blessing. You know the cantrip *spare the dying*. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for this.

The Mark of Hospitality

They may not always have gold, but a halfling with the Mark of Hospitality is sure to be rich in friends. The magic of the mark allows the bearer to keep a place clean, and to heat, chill, and season food. But it also helps the bearer connect with others, setting troubled minds at ease—a powerful tool, though it can cause anger if abused.

Mark of Hospitality Traits

The Mark of Hospitality manifests exclusively on halflings. If your character has the Mark of Hospitality, this is your halfling subrace.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 1.

Innkeeper's Charms. You know the cantrips *friends* and *prestidigitation*. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for them.

Ever Hospitable. When you make a Charisma (Persuasion) check or an ability check involving brewer's supplies or cook's utensils, you can roll one Intuition die (a d4) and add the number rolled to the ability check.

The Mark of Making

The Mark of Making guides its bearer through any act of creation. The bearer of the mark can mend broken things with a touch, and always has a minor magic item they've been working on. An artificer or a wizard will get the most out of the mark, but anyone can find a use for an enchanted blade.

Mark of Making Traits

The Mark of Making only manifests on humans. If your character has the Mark of Making, these traits replace the human's Ability Score Increase trait given in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ability Score Increase. Your Intelligence and Dexterity scores increase by 1. Increase either Intelligence or Dexterity by an additional 1 point.

Artisan's Intuition. When you make an ability check with artisan's tools, roll 1d4 and add it to the result.

Maker's Gift. You know the cantrip *mending*. You gain proficiency with one type of artisan's tools.

Magecraft. You can create a temporary magic item out of common materials. Choose a cantrip from the wizard spell list. Describe the item connected to it. As long as you possess the item, you know that cantrip. At the end of a long rest, you can replace this with a new item and select a new cantrip from the wizard spell list.

Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for these cantrips.

Spellsmith. You can spend one minute to weave a temporary enchantment into a nonmagical suit of armor or weapon. For the next hour the object becomes a magic item, gaining a +1 bonus to AC if it's armor or a +1 bonus to hit and damage if it's a weapon. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

The Mark of Passage

The Mark of Passage governs motion, allowing its bearer to move with uncanny speed and precision. Running, leaping, climbing—the Mark of Passage enhances every form of movement. The bearer of the mark can even slip through space, leaping from point to point in the blink of an eye.

Mark of Passage Traits

The Mark of Passage only manifests on humans. If your character has the Mark of Passage, these traits replace the human's Ability Score Increase trait given in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity score increases by 2, and one other ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Courier's Speed. Your base walking speed increases to 40 ft.

Intuitive Motion. When you make a Strength (Athletics) check or any ability check to operate or maintain a land vehicle, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Orien's Grace. During your turn, you can spend an amount of movement equal to half your speed to activate this trait. Once you activate Orien's Grace, you don't provoke opportunity attacks for the rest of the turn.

Shared Passage. You can use your bonus action to teleport up to your speed to an unoccupied space that you can see. You can bring one willing creature of your size or smaller who is carrying gear up to its carrying capacity. The creature must be within 5 feet of you. Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

The Mark of Scribing

The Mark of Scribing deals with communication—both the written and spoken word. A gnome who bears the mark can *feel* words as though they are living creatures, struggling to make their meaning known. The mark provides a range of gifts. It translates languages, but it also allows its bearer to speak to others at a distance and to inscribe their words wherever they wish.

Mark of Scribing Traits

The Mark of Scribing manifests exclusively on gnomes. If your character has the Mark of Scribing, this is your gnome subrace.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 1.

Gifted Scribe. You are proficient with calligrapher's supplies and forgery kits. When you make an ability check using either one of these tools, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Scribe's Insight. You can cast *comprehend languages* once with this trait, and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for it.

Whispering Wind. You know the *message* cantrip. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for it.

Extra Language. You can speak, read, and write one extra language of your choice.

The Mark of Sentinel

The Mark of Sentinel warns and protects. It heightens senses and reflexes, allowing an heir to respond to threats with uncanny speed. It can shield its bearer from harm. Whether on the battlefield or the ballroom, someone who carries the Mark of Sentinel is always prepared for danger.

Mark of Sentinel Traits

The Mark of Sentinel only manifests on humans. If your character has the Mark of Sentinel, these traits replace the human's Ability Score Increase trait given in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ability Score Increase. Your Strength and Wisdom scores both increase by 1. In addition, one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Sentinel's Intuition. When you roll for Initiative or make a Wisdom (Perception) check to notice a threat, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Sentinel's Shield. You know the *blade ward* cantrip. You can cast the *shield* spell once with this trait and you regain ability to do so after you finish a short or long rest.

Vigilant Guardian. As an action, you can designate an ally you can see as your ward. You have advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Wisdom (Perception) checks made to spot threats to your ward. In addition, when you are within 5 feet of your ward, and that creature is the target of an attack that you can see, you can use your reaction to swap places with your ward. When you do, you become the target of the attack.

The Mark of Shadow

The Mark of Shadows lets an elf weave illusions from shadows, crafting sounds and images to distract or delight. The mark also allows its bearer to draw on the shadows, making it an easy matter to avoid detection or even disappear while in plain sight. It is a valuable tool for an entertainer, a spy, or an assassin; each elf who bears it will have to decide which path to follow.

Mark of Shadow Traits

The Mark of Shadow only manifests on elves. If your character has the Mark of Shadow, this is your elf subrace.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 1.

Natural Talent. You gain proficiency with one musical instrument or the Performance skill.

Gift of the Shadows. When you make a Charisma (Performance) or Dexterity (Stealth) check, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Shape Shadows. You know the *minor illusion* cantrip. Charisma is your spellcasting ability for this trait.

Slip Into Shadow. You can use the Hide action as a bonus action, even if you have no cover or if you're under observation. Regardless of whether you succeed or fail, once you use this ability, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

The Mark of Storm

Wind and water welcome the half-elf who carries the Mark of Storms. The wind catches them when they fall, and they swim with remarkable speed. Those who possess the Greater Dragonmark and dragonshard focus items can call on even greater powers, shaping the weather and calling on the power of the storm.

Mark of Storm Traits

The Mark of Storm manifests exclusively on half-elves. If your character has the Mark of Detection, these traits replace the half-elf's Ability Score Increase, Skill Versatility, and Languages given in the *Player's Handbook*.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity and Charisma scores both increase by 1. In addition, one ability score of your choice increases by 1.

Sea Monkey. Your base walking speed is 30 feet, and you have a swim speed of 30 feet.

Windwright's Intuition. When you make a Dexterity (Acrobatics) check or any ability check involving operating or maintaining a water or air vehicle, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Storm's Blessing. You have resistance to lightning damage.

Headwinds. You know the *gust* cantrip. When you reach 3rd level, you can cast the *gust of wind* spell once with this trait and regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and Elvish.

Gust

Transmutation cantrip

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Instantaneous

You seize the air and compel it to create one of the following effects at a point you can see within range:

- One Medium or smaller creature that you choose must succeed on a Strength saving throw or be pushed up to 5 feet away from you.
- You create a small blast of air capable of moving one object that is neither held nor carried and that weighs no more than 5 pounds. This object is pushed up to 10 feet away from you. It isn't pushed with enough force to cause damage.
- You create a harmless sensory effect using air, such as causing leaves to rustle, wind to slam shutters closed, or your clothing to ripple in a breeze.

The Mark of Warding

The Mark of Warding helps its bearers protect things of value. Using the mark, a dwarf can weave wards and seal portals with mystic force. It also provides its bearer with an intuitive understanding of locks and mechanisms used to protect and seal. The decision each heir has to make is whether they'll use this power to keep things safe, or whether they're more interested in opening locks and taking what's inside.

Mark of Warding Traits

The Mark of Warding manifests exclusively on dwarves. If your character has the Mark of Warding, this is your dwarf subrace.

Ability Score Increase. Your Dexterity and Intelligence scores increase by 1.

Master of Locks. When you make an Intelligence (History), Intelligence (Investigation), or Thieves' Tools check involving lock and trap mechanisms, you can roll one Intuition die, a d4, and add the number rolled to the ability check.

Wards and Seals. You can use your mark to cast the *alarm* spell as a ritual. Starting at 3rd level you can cast *arcane lock* once with this trait and you regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest. Intelligence is your spellcasting ability for these spells.

New Feat: Greater Dragonmarks

The Greater Dragonmark feat represents the evolution of a dragonmark—an exponential

increase in both the size of the dragonmark and the powers it bestows.

Only a fraction of dragonmarked heirs ever develop a Greater Dragonmark. The powers that they possess are more powerful than the wide magic that serves as the foundation of the magical economy. Teleportation, instant communication across vast distances—these services are rare, remarkable, and largely unique to the dragonmarked houses.

Greater Dragonmark

Prerequisite: 8th level, Character must possess a dragonmark

Your dragonmark has grown in size and power. This enhances your existing dragonmark, and the benefits are based on the mark that you already possess. A greater dragonmark provides the following benefits:

- The die type of your dragonmarked Intuition Die increases by one.
- Increase one ability score by 1, to a maximum of 20. The abilities available to you are based on your mark, as shown on the Greater Dragonmark Benefits table.

Greater Dragonmark Benefits

Dragonmark	Ability Score Increase	Spells	Spellcasting Ability	Rest Required
Detection	Charisma or Intelligence	<i>see invisibility, true seeing</i>	Intelligence	Long
Finding	Dexterity, Strength, or Wisdom	<i>find the path, locate creature</i>	Wisdom	Long
Handling	Dexterity or Wisdom	<i>beast sense, dominate beast</i>	Wisdom	Long
Healing	Dexterity or Wisdom	<i>greater restoration, mass healing word</i>	Wisdom	Long
Hospitality	Charisma or Dexterity	<i>Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion, sanctuary</i>	Charisma	Long
Making	Dexterity or Intelligence	<i>creation, fabricate</i>	Intelligence	Long
Passage	Dexterity or Constitution	<i>blink, teleportation circle</i>	Constitution	Long
Scribing	Intelligence or Charisma	<i>sending, tongues</i>	Intelligence	Long or Short
Sentinel	Strength or Wisdom	<i>compelled duel, warding bond</i>	Wisdom	Long or Short
Shadow	Charisma or Dexterity	<i>nondetection, mislead</i>	Charisma	Long
Storm	Charisma or Dexterity	<i>control water, control winds</i>	Charisma	Long
Warding	Dexterity or Intelligence	<i>glyph of warding, knock, Leomund's secret chest*</i>	Intelligence	Long

- You learn a set of spells, each of which you can cast once without expending a spell slot or using a material component. The list of spells, the spellcasting ability for these spells, and the type of rest you must complete in order to regain the use of these spells are shown on the Greater Dragonmark Benefits table.

To cast *Leomund's secret chest* using this feat and the Mark of Warding, you must have a Siberys dragonshard with a value of at least 100 gp. While you have this dragonshard in hand, it serves as the spell's focus, and you can use it to summon and dismiss the chest.

Control Winds

5th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 300 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You take control of the air in a 100-foot cube that you can see within range. Choose one of the following effects when you cast the spell. The effect lasts for the spell's duration, unless you use your action on a later turn to switch to a different effect. You can also use your action to temporarily halt the effect or to restart one you've halted.

Gusts. A wind picks up within the cube, continually blowing in a horizontal direction you designate. You choose the intensity of the wind: calm, moderate, or strong. If the wind is moderate or strong, ranged weapon attacks that enter or leave the cube or pass through it have disadvantage on their attack rolls. If the wind is strong, any creature moving against the wind must spend 1 extra foot of movement for each foot moved.

Downdraft. You cause a sustained blast of strong wind to blow downward from the top of the cube. Ranged weapon attacks that pass through the cube or that are made against targets within it have disadvantage on their attack rolls. A creature must make a Strength saving throw if it flies into the cube for the first time on a turn or starts its turn there flying. On a failed save, the creature is knocked prone.

Updraft. You cause a sustained updraft within the cube, rising upward from the cube's bottom

side. Creatures that end a fall within the cube take only half damage from the fall. When a creature in the cube makes a vertical jump, the creature can jump up to 10 feet higher than normal.

Aberrant Dragonmarks

The twelve dragonmarks are tied to specific bloodlines and passed down through families. They are reliable and predictable, and their powers are constructive. They create; they heal; they protect.

But there is another kind of dragonmark: marks that are unpredictable and dangerous to both the bearer and the people around them. Someone with such a mark can kill with a touch or control minds with a glance. Aberrant marks often appear when people from different dragonmarked families produce a child, and for this reason such unions are absolutely forbidden by the Twelve. But aberrant dragonmarks can appear on members of any race, at any age, regardless of bloodline. No two aberrant dragonmarks are exactly alike; even if they grant the same power, they may appear and manifest in different ways. If two aberrant marks might grant *fire bolt*, one mark may be formed from scar tissue while another is traced on the skin in lines of cold fire.

While aberrant dragonmarks can be disturbing, on the surface an aberrant mark seems no more dangerous or threatening than the powers of a sorcerer. So, what makes them significant? Aberrant marks always have flaws. These may not actively hurt a character, but they are always a burden in some way—a burden that could drive a weak-willed person to madness. If you develop an aberrant mark, you can choose a flaw from this list, or you and the DM can develop a unique flaw of your own.

Aberrant Mark Flaw

1d8 Aberrant Mark Flaw

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Your mark is a source of constant pain. |
| 2 | Your mark whispers to you, though you may not understand what it says. |
| 3 | In times of stress, your mark may trigger a cantrip effect involuntarily. |
| 4 | The skin around your mark has an unusual appearance: burned, scaly, withered, etc. |

- 5 Mundane animals become uneasy around you.
- 6 You have dramatic mood swings any time you use your mark.
- 7 Your appearance changes in some minor way every time you use your mark.
- 8 You have horrific nightmares after you use your mark.

Aberrant Dragonmark

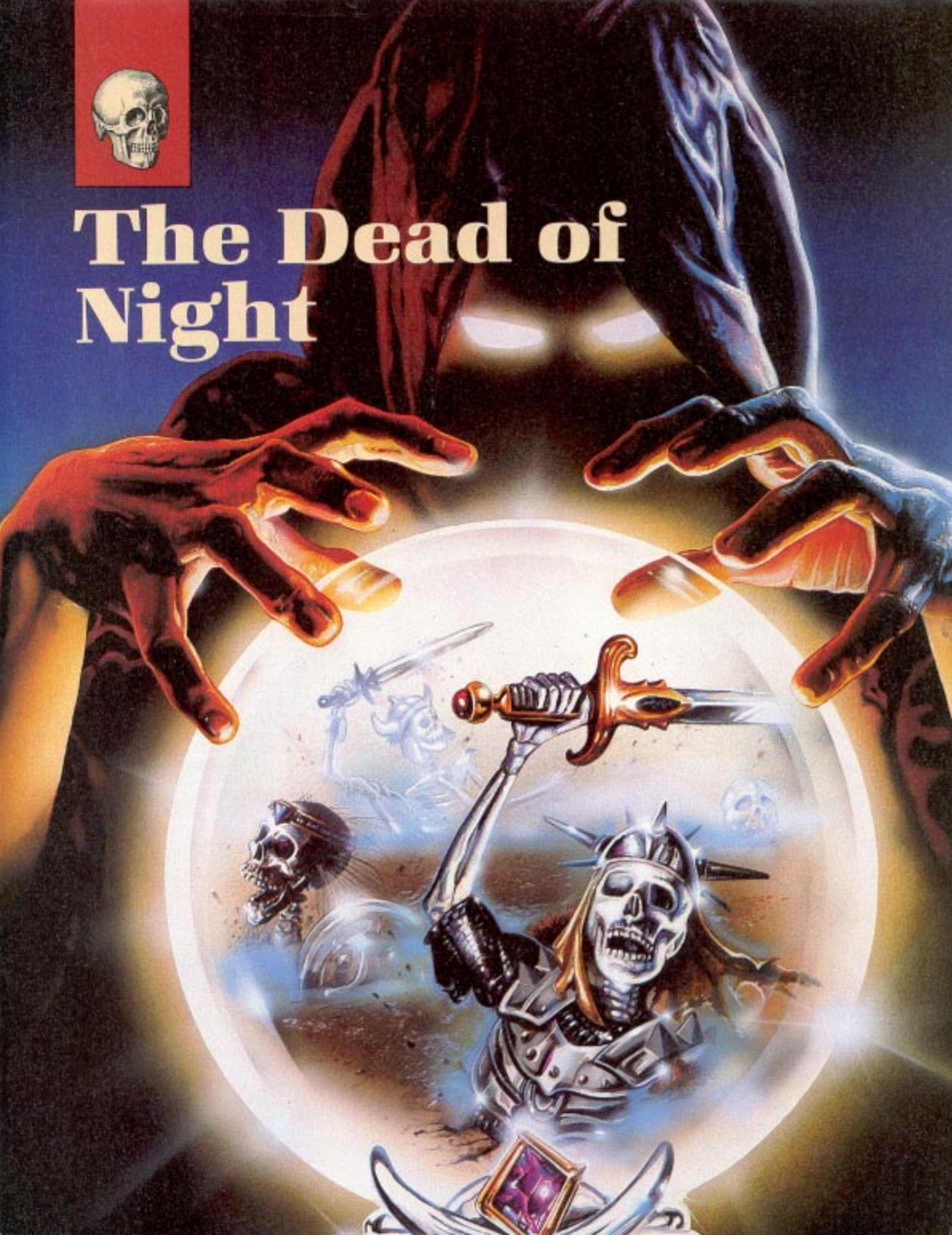
Prerequisite: No existing dragonmark.

You have manifested an aberrant dragonmark. Determine its appearance and the flaw associated with it. You gain the following benefits.

- Increase your Constitution score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You learn a cantrip from the sorcerer spell list. In addition, choose a 1st-level spell from the sorcerer spell list. You learn that spell and can cast it at its lowest level. Once you cast it, you must finish a long rest before you can cast it again. Constitution is your spellcasting ability for these spells.
- You can increase the power of your aberrant spells at the risk of your own vitality. When you cast a spell with your aberrant mark, you can use one of your Hit Die to increase the spell's level by 1. Immediately after you cast the spell, roll the Hit Die. You take damage equal to the number rolled.



The Dead of Night





Hearts of Darkness

Vampires, from Dracula to Ch'ing Shih



by Tom Moldvay

The word "vampire" is derived from the Slavic word "vampir." Indeed, vampire legends are strong in the traditional folklore of all Slavic countries (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Russia). The classic vampire legends, however, come from the ancient Kingdom of Hungary and were probably created by the Slavic minority of the country.

A vampire is a malign, animated corpse that seeks nourishment and causes harm by sucking the blood of sleeping persons. The best known version of the vampire legend adds several other traits:

1. A vampire operates only at night. It must sleep during the day, resting in a coffin which contains some of the soil in which it was originally buried. At best, a vampire can exist for only a few minutes in direct sunlight before being destroyed.

2. A vampire cannot cross the threshold of a dwelling unless first invited inside. Once it gains permission, it can return at night at will.

3. A vampire cannot, by itself, cross running water (such as a stream or river). If one of the living provides assistance, it can cross safely. A vampire also needs assistance to cross salt water.

4. A vampire can turn itself into a vampire bat. This trait is a fairly recent addition to the vampire legend, since vampire bats are only found in the Caribbean Sea and South America. Many vampires have other shape-shifting powers and can transform themselves into other animal shapes, especially those of wolves.

5. A vampire holds the allegiance of certain types of animals — especially those which are malicious or love the night. The most typical animals here are bats, wolves, and rats. Some vampires can even summon these creatures to their aid. The most powerful vampires also have hereditary human helpers; generations of families, even entire clans, may serve the same powerful vampire, acting as its living allies. (AD&D® game monsters with an affinity for vampires include lamias, rakhshasas, striges, and pseudo-vampires.)

6. A vampire has an aversion to certain plants (such as garlic), holy symbols (such as the cross), and fragrances (such as holy incense). The more powerful vampires can temporarily overcome their aversion (especially if the will of the victim weakens).

7. A vampire can change into a mistlike form which can see through the tiniest crack. In fact, this mist is usually the way in which the vampire leaves its coffin, which is normally kept buried underground.

8. A vampire has supernatural strength and agility. A normal human has no chance against it in combat. The strength and dexterity of a vampire allow it to perform feats impossible to normal humans, like climbing sheer surfaces or leaping across great distances.

9. At night, outside its coffin, a vampire is invulnerable to most attacks. Normal weapons, even bullets, have no effect on it. Some vampires, however, can be harmed by silver weapons or weapons that have been especially blessed.

10. A vampire cannot eat normal food. Its only nourishment is fresh blood. At most, a vampire can pretend to eat a few crumbs and sip a bit of wine. Even then, the food and drink will cause it pain.

11. A vampire is a soulless creature. It thus casts no reflection in mirrors, nor does it cast a shadow like living creatures.

12. A vampire is generally described as being exceedingly gaunt and lean, with deathly pale skin. Most of the time, its skin is as cold as ice and radiates the chill of the grave. Occasionally, its skin grows fevered and burning, like a hot coal. Its eyes either glow with a hideous red light or are icy blue-gray. The lips are rich and full, and are the color of fresh blood. A vampire's teeth are white and gleaming, with long, pointed canines. Its nails are usually long and pointed like talons. The vampire initially smells unbearably fetid and rank, like the stench of a decomposing body. As time goes on (and the vampire's body would normally have decayed to mere bones), the vampire merely smells a bit stale and musty, like a closed room that needs airing. The stench of a vampire can be temporarily suppressed and is strongest just before it attacks.

13. Before feasting on a victim, a vampire has an aged, hollow look. After draining a victim, the vampire looks younger and somewhat bloated.

14. A vampire has strong hypnotic powers and can use these powers to break the will of a victim. It is especially dangerous to look into a vampire's eyes. The mesmeric attraction often has a sexual basis, and many vampires can more easily hypnotize victims of the opposite sex (though only the blood, not the sex, of a victim is important to the vampire).

15. If so desired, a vampire can transform its victims into vampires, thus spreading the curse of the undead. Only a select few of the victims become vampires; most victims merely die as a result of being drained by the bite of a vampire.

16. A vampire can only be killed while asleep in its coffin. There are three traditional methods for slaying a vampire: drive a stake through its heart, cut off its head, or completely burn its body. Severing the head and placing the remains in running water is said to be good, as is exposing the vampire to direct sunlight.

The usual wood from which the stake should be made is hawthorn or whitethorn. In Russian folklore, aspen or maple is used. It is important to drive the stake right through the heart of a vampire in one single stroke. If it takes more than one blow, the vampire can later return to its undead state.

Similarly, the vampire's head should be severed in a single blow. The ideal weapon

to sever the head of a vampire is a sharpened spade used to dig graves. If at all possible, the same shovel used to originally bury the vampire should be used to destroy it.

Cremation is a fairly universal method to destroy vampires. If vampires have no body, they cannot roam as animated corpses. Considering how malign and powerful vampires can be, it is probably best to use several methods of execution simultaneously just to be on the safe side.

Other vampire legends

There are a number of other legends which are not necessarily part of the classic vampire myth. In Slavic folklore, the vampire and the werewolf are closely related. In fact, the surest way to become a vampire after death is to have been a werewolf in life. Another way to become a vampire is to eat the flesh of an animal that has been killed by a wolf (especially a werewolf in wolf form). The idea is that the wolf's bite has spread the contagion. Not surprisingly, werewolves and vampires continue to be closely associated. In fact, the wolves summoned by a vampire are more likely to be werewolves than normal wolves.

The connection between the werewolf and vampire can be used as the basis for a subplot in fantasy games. A party of adventurers might manage to kill a werewolf — only to be stalked, several days later, by a vampire (who is actually the werewolf returned from the grave for revenge).

In some legends, it is not only the bite of the vampire which is deadly — it is also the breath of the vampire, which is particularly fetid and smells of rotting corpses. The breath also has another quality of rotting corpses — it carries all sorts of diseases. Thus, in some countries, contagious diseases are thought to start with the breath of a vampire.

In Chinese legend, the misty vampire form is also connected to those gaseous marsh lights which are the basis for the will-o'-the-wisp legends. Again, there is a chain of logic that connects vampires to disease. Swamps are known both for their heavy mists and the diseases they breed. Vampires must, therefore, breed disease because of their misty form. In addition, vampires are bloodsuckers, as are mosquitoes, which are similarly notorious for carrying and transmitting disease.

Real vampires?

Vampires are not merely a mythological phenomenon. Throughout history, there have been people who believed in the physical existence of vampires. There are, in fact, numerous historical accounts of the alleged sighting and slaying of vampires. Most of the reports are second- or third-hand, and should be viewed with suspicion. Even so, the sheer number of "authentic" accounts have led some individuals to speculate whether or not there

might be some real basis to the vampire myths. Two of the more interesting explanations are those of "catalepsy" and the "psychic sponge."

Catalepsy is a kind of trance-state which is virtually identical with death. The bodily functions are so reduced that there are no noticeable vital signs. Before the advent of modern medical techniques, an examination of a cataleptic, even by a skilled doctor, would have revealed no heartbeat or breathing.

The condition of catalepsy in the past could easily lead to premature burials, since no form of embalming techniques were formerly used. No one knows for sure how common premature burials once were, but there is plenty of evidence for both catalepsy and premature burials. One investigator, Dr. Franz Hartmann, collected details of more than 700 cases of premature burial. Most unfortunate victims of premature burial awoke in their coffins and eventually suffocated, unable to break out. But in some cases, panic gave the victim superhuman strength. If the grave was shallow or the ground especially loose, the victim was able to escape from the coffin.

In most cases, the victim had never heard of catalepsy or premature burial. The dead were dead, and only corpses were buried. The victim had been buried; he must therefore be dead. But the victim could move and feel. Only vampires came back from the dead with uncorrupted bodies. The logic was inescapable: The victim must be a vampire.

It's easy to see how the victim, too, could believe he was a vampire and would act exactly as a vampire was expected to act. The trauma of the premature burial could easily induce a kind of insanity in which the victim hallucinated changing shapes, having hypnotic powers, and growing younger with each drink of blood. If the victim continued to live by murdering people and drinking blood, the belief would be more strongly reinforced with each new drink (blood has enough nutritional value that it could sustain a minimum level of life).

If a sane victim tried to return to his family, the villagers would be likely to treat him as a vampire. In fact, in many of the historical accounts, the "vampire" looks and acts perfectly normal — except for the fact that he had been buried some time before. There are accounts of people returning from the grave to take up life as normal, even having children after they had supposedly died.

The catalepsy theory can provide an interesting subplot, especially for lower-level adventures. What if the vampire the characters meet in a dungeon was actually a victim of a premature burial who believed he was a vampire? The subplot allows for plenty of inventive role-playing by both the DM and the players. If the characters eventually discover the truth without killing the "vampire," there could

be the additional mission of trying to return the victim to his home and convince everyone that the poor fellow really wasn't a vampire.

A "psychic sponge" or "psychic vampire" is a more bizarre concept — a person who appears to physically drain the energy of other people. Psychic vampirism, according to some sources, is largely an unconscious psychic power. The individual really doesn't know why everyone around him grows pale and tired and seems to be constantly ill while he keeps growing stronger.

If vital energy can actually be drained in some psychic way, then it could explain many of the symptoms of supposed vampire victims. People in a village where such a being lived would become pale and sickly for no apparent reason. After a time, the villagers might notice something was wrong. If they dug up enough graves, by the laws of chance, one would be sure to contain a body that had not decomposed at a normal rate. Here would be "proof" that a vampire was ravaging the village.

Dracula: lord of vampires

The most famous vampire, Dracula, though familiar to most of us as a character in a novel, is based on stories about an actual historical individual. Dracula's real name was Vlad Tepes. In A.D. 1431, the same year that Vlad was born, his father (also named Vlad) was made a knight of the Order of the Dragon, a paramilitary organization dedicated to fighting the Turks. In Rumanian, "dragon" is "dracul." So, the father was given the nickname Dracul, and his son was given the nickname Dracula, which means "son of Dracul." Unfortunately, "dracul" also means "devil." Thus, Dracula could mean either "son of the dragon" or "son of the devil."

Vlad Dracul was Prince of Wallachia from 1436-1442 and again from 1443-1447. The small country of Wallachia (which today comprises one-third of Rumania) lies between the lower Danube River and the Carpathian Mountains. Wallachia was nominally a Banates (frontier march) of the Kingdom of Hungary, but it had been essentially an independent country since about 1360.

At the time that Vlad Dracul was prince, Wallachia was in imminent danger of being absorbed by the Turkish Empire then overrunning most of the Balkans. Any leader of Wallachia was stuck in the middle of a power struggle between the Turks and the Hungarians. Both tried to put candidates favorable to their side on the throne, and both sent armies or assassins when they became displeased with the prince's rule.

In 1444, Vlad Dracul and his two oldest sons, Mircea and Vlad, joined the anti-Turk crusade which led to the disastrous defeat of the Western crusaders at Varna. After the defeat, Vlad Dracul was forced to give up his second son, Vlad, and his youngest

son, Radu, as hostages to the Turks. For the next four years, the young Dracula was a Turkish prisoner. While the imprisonment was not always physically harsh, it was an extreme mental ordeal since Dracula was likely to be executed at any moment if the Turks did not like his father's policies. During those years, Dracula came to view life as fleeting and cheap. In reaction to his imprisonment, he developed a reputation for trickery, cunning, insubordination, and brutality.

By remaining on good terms with the Turkish Sultan, Vlad Dracul angered the protector of Hungary, John Hunyadi. Henchmen of Hunyadi murdered Vlad Dracul and his eldest son Mircea in December of 1447. John Hunyadi then placed his own candidate, Vladislav II, on the throne of Wallachia. Backed by the Turks, Dracula became Prince of Wallachia for two months in 1448. But the Hungarian faction was too strong. Dracula fled to Moldavia, the northernmost Rumanian principality. There, he formed a close friendship and alliance with his cousin Steven.

Politics in Moldavia were as dangerous as in Wallachia. In 1451, Steven's father, Bogdan, was murdered, and the two cousins fled. Dracula managed to make peace with John Hunyadi and served under Hunyadi in John's constant fight against the Turks. From 1451-1456, Dracula lived in Transylvania, which is now the third province of Rumania, but which was traditionally a part of the Kingdom of Hungary. Transylvania contained many Hungarians and Germans as well as Romanians.

Vladislav II was having the same kind of problems Dracula's father once had. In 1456, John Hunyadi decided that Vladislav was favoring the Turks too much. He loaned Dracula the nucleus of an army and sent him to regain the throne of Wallachia. Dracula defeated Vladislav and became Prince of Wallachia again.

Now, Dracula could release all his pent-up hatreds. He executed the members of the faction that killed his father. Since he couldn't be sure exactly who was guilty, he solved the problem by killing 500 suspects, among whom were bound to be the 20 or so men responsible for his father's death. Dracula raided the Turks, whom he hated with pathological fervor, and also raided the German merchant towns of Transylvania. The Germans had come to Transylvania hundreds of years before as immigrants from Saxony, invited by the Hungarian king to encourage commerce. To many of the Rumanians, the Germans were foreign upstarts, monopolizing trade throughout Transylvania. On St. Bartholomew's Day, August 24, 1460, nearly 30,000 men, women, and children of German descent were slain on a hill outside the city of Brasov in Transylvania.

But Dracula's main enemies were the Turks. In 1461-1462, he led a campaign against them in which he made full use of guerrilla tactics and terrorism. By Dracula's

own count, his forces slew 23,809 Turks. In fact, Dracula cut off the heads, noses, or ears of the Turks to keep an accurate count, then sent them as presents to neighboring Christian rulers to enlist their aid against the infidel Turks (without success). Dracula's favorite means of killing his victims was by impaling them on a stake. This practice gave him his second nickname, "Tepes" which means "The Impaler."

By the end of 1462, Vlad Tepes was driven from the throne by his younger brother Radu, who had become a Turkish puppet. When Vlad appealed to Mathias Corvinus, son of John Hunyadi and now King of Hungary, he was imprisoned. Mathias was concentrating on political maneuvers in Europe, and he needed a quiet border with the Turks.

Vlad Tepes was still a valuable political asset. Eventually, he converted from the Orthodox to the Roman Catholic religion and married one of Mathias' sisters. When Stephen (the Great) of Moldavia, a remarkable cousin of Vlad who managed to hold the throne for nearly 50 years, supported Dracula's claim to Wallachia, the time was ripe for Vlad's return. The official commander of the expedition was Stephen Bathory, Prince of Transylvania (soon to be elected King of Poland). The army was made up of Hungarians, Wallachians, Transylvanians, and Moldavians. In 1476, they defeated the Turks and set Dracula once more on the throne of Wallachia.

But Dracula had alienated too many factions among his subjects. Before he could consolidate his reign, his enemies united against him, and Dracula was slain on a hilltop outside Bucharest. His third reign had lasted barely two months.

In his own day, Dracula was notorious. Numerous writers, especially Germans sympathetic to their Transylvanian cousins, wrote about him as the "Blood Monster" Bram Stoker knew some of the stories about Dracula and made them the basis for his main character in the novel of the same name.

Dracula was certainly bloodthirsty with a pathological cruelty. He firmly believed in the effects of terror to intimidate his subjects and defeat his enemies. Even his favored means of torture, the stake, made him a natural candidate for the vampire legend that grew around him.

At the same time, Dracula managed to maintain some shreds of personal honor. It was his boast that a person could walk across Wallachia with a bag of gold and be completely safe from bandits (who feared his wrath too much to operate in the country). There were many cases in which Dracula personally rewarded faithful service. No one questioned Dracula's personal courage or his prowess as a warrior. He was even something of a patriot,

So, the main character of the novel *Dracula* is no mere one-sided personality. He is evil, certainly, and terrifying, cruel, and merciless — yet he retains a hint of

honor, his courage is undaunted, and he is still human enough to fall in love, in his own twisted way.

Since Dracula is the best-known vampire, he can serve as a kind of vampire prince in AD&D games. One could always assume that Dracula was summoned to the AD&D game universe by an evil magic-user who probably got more than he bargained for.

DRACULA (Vlad Tepes)

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
 NO. APPEARING: 2
 ARMOR CLASS: -1 (-4 with dexterity)
 MOVE: 12"/18"
 HIT DICE: 12 (96 hp)
 % IN LAIR: 10%
 TREASURE TYPE: G
 NO. OF ATTACKS: 2 (by touch or weapon)
 DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-8 (+7)
 SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Energy drain, hypnosis, +4 to hit in combat*
 SPECIAL DEFENSES: +1 or better weapon to hit
 MAGIC RESISTANCE: 25%
 INTELLIGENCE: *Exceptional*
 ALIGNMENT! *Chaotic evil*
 SIZE: M
 PSIONIC ABILITY: 204
 Attack/Defense Modes: B,C/J

S: 19 I: 17 W: 17
 D: 17 C: 19 CH: 17

Dracula is similar to the usual AD&D game vampire in the *Monster Manual*, except as noted in this article. His strength is 19 (as per *Legends & Lore*), and he can wield a long sword if he so desires, doing 8-15 hp damage per attack (the weapon may be magical as well). Dracula can regenerate 5 hp per melee round. Garlic, mirrors, and holy symbols only cause him to hesitate 1-2 rounds because of his strength of will, and he can survive up to 10 rounds in sunlight or running water. Dracula is assumed to have been reborn as a true vampire after his death, perhaps being summoned to a magical universe by an unlucky wizard. It is highly likely that he would make use of magical weapons and items in an AD&D game world, selecting those items appropriate to warriors since he had no skill at magic or the priesthood in life. Magical rings, amulets, scrolls of protection, swords and daggers, and similar items would be preferred.

Unlike most vampires, who have been completely overwhelmed by their transition into the undead, Dracula can sometimes overcome his undead state of mind by sheer willpower. It is possible that he could be impressed enough by an exceptional display of courage or faithful service on the part of a character or retainer to call off any attacks he is making. It is probable that Dracula will become involved in the politics of whatever world

	VRYKOLAKAS	GREAT VRYKOLAKAS
FREQUENCY:	<i>Rare</i>	<i>Very rare</i>
NO. APPEARING:	1-10	1
ARMOR CLASS:		- 2
MOVE:	12/	12"
HIT DICE:	7	13
% IN LAIR:	25%	10%
TREASURE TYPE:	E	G
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1-10	2-20
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	<i>Energy drain (see text)</i>	<i>Energy drain (see text)</i>
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>+1 or better weapon to hit</i>
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	<i>See below</i>	30%
INTELLIGENCE:	<i>Average</i>	<i>Average</i>
ALIGNMENT!	<i>Chaotic evil</i>	<i>Chaotic evil</i>
SIZE:	M	M
PSIONIC ABILITY:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>

he enters. His relationship with Orcus, demon prince of the undead, is best left to the DM's imagination.

When trying to turn Dracula away, a cleric should consider this monster to be classed in the "special" category. Conversely, though Dracula has no other clerical abilities-as such, he may exert his incredible willpower to force other undead beings into servitude for short periods of time. Treat him as an evil 12th-level cleric, making the usual attempts to call undead into service as per the rules for turning undead.

Vampires in Greece

The vampire in Greek folklore is called the *vrykolakas*. Both the *vrykolakas* and the vampire are animated corpses that prey upon the living, but the *vrykolakas* differs from the vampire in a number of details.

A *vrykolakas* has a weird, distinctive look. The 17th-century writer Leo Allatius gives an eyewitness account of the exumation of a man believed to be a *vrykolakas*: "On top of the bones of other men there was found lying a corpse perfectly whole; it was unusually tall of stature; clothes it had none, time or moisture having caused them to perish. The skin was distended, hard, and livid, and so swollen everywhere that the body had no flat surfaces but was round like a full sack. The face was covered with hair dark and curly; on the head there was little hair, as also on the rest of the body, which appeared smooth all over. The arms, by reason of

the swelling of the corpse, were stretched out on each side like the arms of a cross. The hands were open, the eyelids closed, the mouth gaping, and the teeth white.

"Such bodies do not, like those of other dead men, suffer decomposition after burial, nor turn to dust, but having, as it appears, a skin of extreme toughness become swollen and distended all over, so that the joints can scarcely be bent; the skin becomes stretched like the parchment of a drum, and when struck gives out the same sound."

The *vrykolakas* is not self-animated. Instead, an evil spirit enters the body, causing it to move about. The *vrykolakas* would thus be the result of a bizarre kind of demonic possession, all the more terrible because the dead person has no mind to actively resist the takeover.

The *vrykolakas* is most active at night, but only because devils and demons prefer darkness, not because the monster itself is in any way allergic to sunlight. If it so wishes, the *vrykolakas* can terrorize its victims in the daytime. In fact, a Greek proverb advises people to "beware of the noontime vampire."

This monster delights in inflicting random violence and spreading panic. The *vrykolakas* does not so much feed off the blood of the living as it does their terror and fright. One common practice of the *vrykolakas* is to seat itself upon a sleeping victim and, by its enormous weight and horrific presence, cause an agonizing sense of oppression. A victim who dies from this oppression will himself become a *vrykolakas*.

In a short time, the original vrykolakas can gather a large and dangerous train of followers. Furthermore, as time goes on, the vrykolakas becomes more and more audacious and bloodthirsty, so that it is able to completely devastate whole villages. According to legend, if the vrykolakas is not annihilated within 80 days of its first appearance, it will become a merciless and invincible dealer of death. The mere sight of the vrykolakas in this state could cause death.

Among the many legends of the vrykolakas are some curious ones. One says that when the vrykolakas first returns from the dead, it goes to its native village at night, knocking at doors and calling for one person of the household. If that person answers, he will die the next day. But a vrykolakas never calls twice, and so the inhabitants of the island of Chios (from which this legend springs) always wait for a second call at night before answering.

Even as late as 1910, according to John Lawson (author of *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*), the island of Santorini was notorious for its vampires (i.e., vrykolakas). "To send vampires to Santorini" was an expression synonymous with sending "owls to Athens" or "coals to Newcastle." (American equivalents might be sending "cars to Detroit" or "movies to Hollywood.") The present day island of Santorini was known in ancient times as

Thera. About 1,600 years ago, the island of Thera blew apart in a volcanic explosion believed to have been more devastating than even Krakatoa or Mount St. Helens. The resultant tidal waves and heavy fall of ash helped destroy the Minoan civilization and might possibly be the historical basis of the Atlantis myths. Making Santorini the "Isle of the Undead" may reflect some folk memory of that ancient disaster. Areas in a fantasy universe in which huge numbers of people were slain or died all at once might also form breeding grounds for immense numbers of undead.

There are two ways to destroy a vrykolakas. One method is to exorcise the evil spirit which animates the monster. If the exorcism is successful, the corpse immediately begins to decay, rapidly decomposing in a single round until only bones are left. The second method is to dig up the monster's grave and burn the corpse. Presumably, the evil spirit is only in the corpse while it is animated. By finding the grave and exhuming the body, it is possible to catch the evil spirit unaware, before it has a chance to repossess the body.

In the statistics given here for the vrykolakas are two separate columns. The first, termed "Vrykolakas," is for the monster from its initial appearance and for the first 80 days of its existence. The second column, termed "Great Vrykolakas," is for

the monster after 80 days have passed.

Sleep, charm, and hold spells do not affect these creatures, nor do poison or paralysis. A vrykolakas also has a special kind of attack. Each turn, anyone whom the vrykolakas touches must make a saving throw vs. spells (specifically against *fear*, with wisdom bonuses applicable). If the save fails, the victim loses an energy level as the vrykolakas feeds off his fear. The vrykolakas can also attack physically for 1-10 hp damage per strike.

A cleric has the same chance to turn a vrykolakas as he does a mummy. In addition, the *exorcise* spell can force the evil spirit to leave the vrykolakas, rendering the creature harmless and inert.

After 80 days, the vrykolakas gains enough power to become a great vrykolakas. The great vrykolakas has a better armor class and more hit points than an ordinary vrykolakas. It has two attacks per round, each of which does 2-20 hp damage. It also attacks by *fear*, but the power works on anyone who gazes at the great vrykolakas (in addition to anyone it touches). The *fear* power drains two levels if the save is unsuccessful. A great vrykolakas has a 30% resistance to all magic (except the *exorcise* spell).

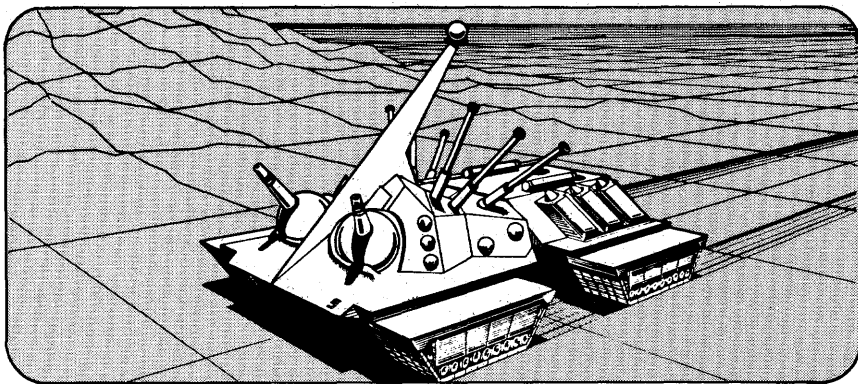
The great vrykolakas is usually accompanied by 1-6 ordinary vrykolakas under its control. For purposes of turning it away, consider the great vrykolakas to be in the "special" category. If the great vrykolakas can be turned away, or the *exorcism* spell succeeds against it, the ordinary vrykolakas are also rendered harmless and "dead" again.

The dancing vampires

A kind of vampire spirit from Highland folklore is the *baobhan sith* (pronounced baavan shee). Since Gaelic can be difficult to pronounce, an alternative spelling of the monster's name could be "bavanshee." The word itself is a dialectic variation of banshee, but the creature is completely different from the usual banshee. The following tale about a *baobhan sith* is retold from C.M. Robertson's *Folklore from the West of Ross-shire*.

Four young men were on a hunting trip and spent the night in an empty shieling, a hut built to give shelter for the sheep in the grazing season. They began to dance, one supplying mouth-music. One of the dancers wished that they had partners. Almost at once, four women came in. Three danced, the fourth stood by the music-maker. But as he hummed, he saw drops of blood falling from the dancers. He fled out of the shieling, pursued by his demon partner, and took refuge among the horses. The woman could not get to him, probably because of the iron with which the horses were shod. Nonetheless, she circled round him all night, and only disappeared when the sun rose. He went back into the shieling and found the bloodless bodies of the dancers lying there. Their partners had drained them white.

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BAOBHAN SITH (Bavanshee)

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 1-8

ARMOR CLASS: 5

MOVE: 12"

HIT DICE: 5

% IN LAIR: 10%

TREASURE TYPE: A

NO. OF ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Spells and blood drain*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*

INTELLIGENCE: *High*

ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*

SIZE: M

PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Baobhan sith are evil spirits that roam at night seeking victims. As minor demons, they are in the "special" category for clerics who seek to turn them. The baobhan sith look like beautiful young women. Using spells, they try to trick their victims into letting them drain all the blood from the victims' bodies. Baobhan sith have the magic-user spells *charm person*, *clairaudience*, *suggestion*, *phantasmal force*, and *teleport*.

If a baobhan sith grasps a victim (who usually allows the touch because of *charm person* or *suggestion*) and makes a successful "to hit" roll for vampiric contact, the creature automatically drains blood for 3-18 hp damage in one round. The *charm* or *suggestion* is then broken, and the victim can fight back normally — but the baobhan sith will not release the victim unless the victim makes a strength roll as if to open doors (e.g., a victim with a strength of 15 can throw off an attacker on a 1-2 on 1d6). The baobhan sith drains 3-18 hp with each further round if not removed. Any victim drained below zero hit points is dead. The baobhan sith has a physical attack (a strike with a clawed hand) which does 1-6 hp damage, but the attack is rarely used since they prefer spells and blood draining.

An iron weapon automatically does double damage to a baobhan sith (and gets a +3 bonus to hit). Since they are especially vulnerable to iron, the baobhan sith will always try to avoid contact with it (they can sense it within a 60' radius). Oddly enough, silvered weapons have only normal effects against them. Holy water does 1-6 hp damage per vial to them.

Oriental vampires

The *ch'ing shih* is a kind of Chinese vampire. Like the vrykolakas, the corpse is actually animated by a sort of demon who preserves the corpse from decay so that it can prey on the living. Unlike the vrykolakas, however, the demon animating the corpse is not entirely alien.

The Chinese believed that a person has two souls: the Hun, or superior soul which

is aligned with the spirits of goodness; and the P'o, or inferior soul, which is aligned with the spirits of evil. If a body is not given the proper funeral rites, the P'o can seize control and animate the corpse. A particularly evil person may become a *ch'ing shih* by purposely separating the two souls. The superior soul can be stored someplace outside the body (much like in the *magic jar* spell) while the inferior soul is given free reign. When the person dies, he will return from the grave to work evil. This type of *ch'ing shih* cannot be destroyed until the superior soul is first liberated from whatever physical object it occupies (usually a clay vase). The physical object must be broken to free the superior soul.

G. Willoughby-Meade, in *Chinese Ghosts and Goblins*, relates a story about four travelers who meet a *ch'ing shih*. The same story is also told by Pu Sung Ling in the book *Liao Chai*.

Four travelers arrived late one night to the village of Tsaitien in Shantung province. They were extremely weary, wanting only to sleep for the night. But the village inn was completely filled. After some lengthy discussion and a bit of bribery, the travelers persuaded the innkeeper to find them some indoor sleeping place, out of the foul weather.

The innkeeper reluctantly led the four travelers to the only place available: a small, lonely house a little distance away where, he told the travelers, his daughter-in-law had recently died. In the one-room cottage, behind a heavy curtain, lay the uncoffined body of the woman. While the circumstances were somewhat gruesome, at least the house was warm and dry. The innkeeper gave the travelers straw pallets and blankets which were comfortable enough. Within minutes, three of the four travelers were fast asleep.

A strange sense of evil seemed to oppress the fourth traveler. In spite of his fatigue, fear prevented him from shutting his eyes for some little while. Yet he was so tired that he could not resist long and had just about fallen asleep when he heard an ominous rustling behind the curtain, which sounded as though somebody was stirring very softly.

Cold, with horror, he peered out from half-closed eyes and he distinctly saw a horrible, stealthy hand thrust itself from behind the curtain, which was noiselessly drawn aside. There stood the livid corpse gazing into the room with a baleful glare. It approached softly and, stooping over the three sleepers, seemed to breathe upon their faces.

The man who was awake buried his head under the quilt, horror-stricken. He felt that the corpse was bending over him, but after a few minutes, as he lay in an agony of terror, he heard the same gentle rustling as before. This time the sound, made by the movement of the stiff grave-clothes, moved away from him. When he cautiously peeped out he noticed that the corpse had returned to its bier and was

stretched out stark and still.

He crept from his place and, not daring to even whisper, shook each of his comrades. But he could not make them move. He then reached for his clothes, but hearing the gentle rustling sound once more, he realized that he had been seen.

In a moment, he flung himself back on the bed and drew the coverlet tightly over his face. A few minutes later he felt the awful creature was standing by his side. However, after looking him over, it seemed to retire again. At length, half mad with fright, the man grabbed some clothes which he threw on and rushed barefoot from the house.

He again heard the corpse stirring, but now it sprang from its bier with a rush of speed. The man was able to bolt and bar the door just as the corpse leaped at it with demoniacal fury. As the man ran at full speed under the light of a waning moon, desperate to put as great a distance between himself and the haunted house as possible, he chanced to glance back and shrieked aloud to see that the corpse was not only following him — it was hard at his heels and gaining rapidly. In desperation, he fled behind a large willow which grew by the side of the road. As the corpse rushed at him in one direction, he darted rapidly in the other.

Fires burned in the corpse's red eyes as it strove to catch its terrorized prey. Finally, as it suddenly swooped upon him with hideous violence, the traveler swooned and fell senseless to the ground. The corpse missed its aim so that it struck the tree, not the man, with all of its might.

At daybreak, both corpse and man were found. When the corpse was pulled away, it was found that it had embedded its taloned fingers so deeply into the tree that it could not free itself. The traveler, after many months of rest, recovered his health — but his companions were found lying dead, poisoned by the fetid breath of the *ch'ing shih*.

The story shows several aspects of the *ch'ing shih*. It is not especially intelligent but is extremely persistent. It is not a true vampire, as it kills with its poisonous breath, not by draining blood. It attacks with a terrible, berserk fury which temporarily gives it increased strength.

A *ch'ing shih* can normally be destroyed by physical attacks. If the superior soul is, however, hidden in some magic container, then the creature will continue coming back to life to stalk its attackers. Normal means of destruction only temporarily destroy the body. Even if it is cremated and the ashes are scattered, the *ch'ing shih* will regenerate a new body after a day or so and return to the attack. If all else fails, it will take possession of some other corpse. If the magic container holding the superior soul is broken, then the *ch'ing shih* will return no longer. Whether or not a particular *ch'ing shih* is the type that has a hidden superior soul is, of course, left to the DM.

CH'ING SHIH

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 1-8

ARMOR CLASS: 3

MOVE: 12" (15" when berserk)

HIT DICE: 7

% IN LAIR: 10%

TREASURE TYPE: Nil

NO. OF ATTACKS: 1 (2 with breath)

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2-12

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Poisonous breath, berserk attack*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Nil

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*

INTELLIGENCE: *Low*

ALIGNMENT! *Chaotic evil*

SIZE: M

PSIONIC ABILITY: Nil

The main attack of the ch'ing shih is its poisonous breath, which can affect any one person within 10' of the creature. At the same time, the ch'ing shih can physically attack, doing 2-12 hp damage with a clawed hand.

During its berserk attack, which may be used once per night for 3-12 melee rounds, the ch'ing shih's strength is considered to be 18/00 (adding +3 to hit and +6 to damage with its claws), although the creature's normal strength is 15.

A cleric has the same chance to turn a

ch'ing shih as he would a spectre. An *exorcism* spell can also drive out the evil P'o animating the corpse, returning the corpse to its formerly inactive state.

The mass-media vampire

While the vampire owes its origin to folklore, it owes its popularity to movies and fiction. In this century, more than 100 movies have been made about vampires. The most popular and enduring have been based on Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*.

In 1921, F.W. Murnau made a classic, silent film version of the story of *Dracula*. Though he gave full credit to Bram Stoker's novel, he didn't get permission to use it. So, he altered the plot and location slightly. The result was the movie *Nosferatu*. The film release was delayed (in fact, nearly all copies of the movie were destroyed) by a lawsuit with the Stoker estate. It was eventually released in London in 1928 and the U.S. in 1929. Since then, it has continued to be shown in the art cinema theaters of the world.

In 1931, the film *Dracula* was released. It starred Bela Lugosi and was directed by Tod Browning. The film was so successful that, for more than a generation, the names "Dracula" and "Bela Lugosi" were virtually synonymous.

In 1958, Hammer Films released its version of the story, entitled *The Horror of*

Dracula. Terence Fisher was the director; *Dracula* was played by Christopher Lee (with Peter Cushing as Dr. Van Helsing). Once again, the performance was so electrifying that the lead actor became identified with the vampire. Christopher Lee also went on to make a number of other movies in which he starred as a vampire.

One of the latest remakes of *Dracula* starred Frank Langella. Like Bela Lugosi, Langella first starred in a hit Broadway play version of *Dracula* before being chosen to star in the movie.

Besides the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, there are several other classic vampire stories. The first well-known vampire story was written by Dr. John William Polidori and was entitled *The Vampyre*. For a long time, the story was actually attributed to Polidori's better-known friend, Lord Byron. The tale came about as the result of one evening when the physician Polidori, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and the daughters of Polidori and his friend Mr. Godwin sat reading ghost stories to each other. Because of that evening, everyone present decided to try to write a horror story. Two of them became classics (Mr. Godwin's daughter married Shelley; later, as Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, she wrote *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* — the first science-fiction novel).

Polidori's tale can be "seen as the start of the vampire craze. While little-known today, the vampire of Polidori's tale (Lord Ruthven), was as well known in the 19th century as *Dracula* is today. Just as movies have been based on *Dracula*, a number of plays were based on Lord Ruthven.

One of the best vampire stories is the novelette *Carmilla* by Sheridan Le Fanu. *Carmilla* first appeared in a collection in 1872 entitled *Through a Glass Darkly*. *Carmilla* is the archetype of a female vampire, and the story has formed a base for at least three movies. It is probable that the story inspired Bram Stoker to write his own vampire tale.

Vampire fiction is as popular today as ever. Fairly recent novels dealing with vampires include: *Salem's Lot*, by Stephen King; *The Hunger*, by Whitley Strieber; *Fevre Dream*, by George R.R. Martin; and *Interview with a Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*, by Anne Rice. Series of novels about vampires are also currently popular. Vampire series include: *The Dracula Tapes*, *The Holmes-Dracula File*, *An Old Friend of the Family*, and *Thorn* by Fred Saberhagen; *Bloodright: The Memoirs of Mircea*, *Son of Dracula*, *The Revenge of Dracula*, and *Dracula, My Love*, by Peter Tremayne; *Hotel Transylvania*, *The Palace*, *Blood Games*, *Tempting Fate*, and *Path of the Eclipse* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro; and *The Black Castle*, *The Silver Skull*, and *Citizen Vampire* by Les Daniels — and there are always "Dark Shadows" reruns on television for die-hard fans.

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Dreadful Tidings





by Tom Moldvay

The Ungrateful Dead

Expanding the ranks of the ghastly host

The term “undead” was popularized by Bram Stoker in his novel, *Dracula*. He used it as a synonym for “vampire,” but he implied that there might be other kinds of undead besides the minions of the Count. Vampires in general (and *Dracula* in particular) have proved a continual source of inspiration for the horror genre [see “*Hearts of Darkness*,” from *DRAGON*® issue #126, for more on this topic]. In the proliferation of horror movies, the word “undead” came to be used for a variety of monsters, most of which had some connection with vampires.

Undead monsters are an essential part of the AD&D® game. For example, the ability of clerics to turn the undead is one of the prime functions of that class. Undead are frequently encountered in adventures and fit well into nearly any plot, because their motivations are simple and easy to understand — they hate the living and seek to destroy all life.

Indeed, the undead are the archetypes of monsters. They are evil and deadly, with frightening powers. Their hatreds are unreasoning; their attacks are guaranteed. Characters facing the undead have but two choices: fight or run.

The term “undead” literally means “not dead,” with the implication that such creatures are also “not living.” Undead thus have the semblance of life in that they have bodies but are not truly alive. To provide high-level clerics with foes, the concept of “undeath” has been expanded in the AD&D game to include ghostlike creatures from other planes of existence, but even the ghost can semi-materialize to attack by touch.

Of the more than 350 monsters in the *Monster Manual I* and among the other

creatures described in later books, there appear a number of “classical” undead, archetypes that form the basis of the entire category of undead monsters. Classical undead have three things in common: 1) By all rights, such creatures should be dead; 2) Most such creatures have some sort of physical form; and 3) Most such creatures are hopelessly evil and attack living beings on sight.

This article will examine three of these classical undead in detail: skeletons, zombies, and ghouls. In particular, this article will look at the background of each kind of undead, the function of each undead type in game terms, possible variations on the basic monster listings, and suggestions for adventure subplots.

The background section of each listing will try to answer questions like: What inspired the idea for this monster? Are there traditional myths dealing with this kind of undead? Does the monster appear often in books or movies?

If the Dungeon Master understands the game function of any particular monster, he or she can use the creature to maximum effect. It also becomes easier to alter the monster slightly for its surprise value or design a new creature that serves a similar function. Variety keeps the players guessing; an element of uncertainty keeps an adventure interesting.

While an entire adventure based on the undead might be too heavily slanted toward the cleric character class, a subplot dealing with the undead fits well into any adventure. (Perhaps the undead haunt a small cemetery or roam a deserted castle tower near the main adventure area.) Subplots should be kept reasonably small, dealing with a half-dozen encounters at

most. The best subplots would be adventures in miniature, each having a logic all its own. Good subplots have their own beginnings and ends, with crises that must be resolved.

Skeletons

The skeleton listing is not based on traditional lore and was invented for the game. Skeletons are, however, universal symbols of death and the dead. Skeleton costumes are traditional for Halloween, the night when the dead return to join the living. The Grim Reaper is often depicted as a giant skeleton wielding a scythe. The major arcana card of Death in the tarot deck often shows a skeleton. Skeletons that move defy the laws of nature. They are a logical choice when making up a class of undead.

In the AD&D game, skeletons are magically animated by clerics or magic-users. More often than not, the spell-caster is evil, since disturbing the dead is not something encouraged by the forces of good or neutrality. The corpse used for the *animate dead* spell has been buried for so long that only bones remain (or perhaps all flesh is destroyed in the process of animation, leaving only bones). Skeletons are the weakest of the undead. In game terms, their function is to try to swamp low-level characters by sheer numbers.

A traditional monster from English folklore similar to skeletons is Bloody Bones. The monster's full name is Rawhead-and-Bloody-Bones, and it is sometimes referred to as Old Bloody Bones or Tommy Rawhead. Samuel Johnson, in his 17th-century dictionary, defined the creature as “the name of a spectre, mentioned to fright children.” (Here, spectre is, of course, used generically, and bears no relationship to the AD&D game monster of the same name.)

In *Folklore Society County Publications* (of England), Ruth Tongue quotes two informants who described Bloody Bones as living in dark shadowy places such as in deep cupboards, inside closets, or under the stairs. Those who are heroic enough to peep through a crack might get a glimpse of the dreadful crouching creature, with blood running down its face, seated waiting on a pile of bones that once belonged to children who told lies or said bad words. However, if you spied upon the monster, it knew about it and got you anyway.

Most creatures classed as “nursery bogies” are based on earlier legendary tales of monsters. In Lancashire and Yorkshire, Rawhead-and-Bloody-Bones is a kind of evil spirit haunting old marl pits and similar places. In Cornwall, Old Bloody Bones lives in abandoned mines, especially those near the sites of ancient battles. Bloody Bones lies waiting to grab victims who pass nearby, dragging the unwary down into deep forbidding lairs.

BLOODY BONES

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: 1 (30% chance of 2-12)
ARMOR CLASS: 7
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 3
% IN LAIR: 50%
TREASURE TYPE: 40% chance each of J-N
(B in lair if more than 1)
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-10
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Fear*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Low*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Bloody bones are the undead, animated corpses of evil criminals cursed to continue their horrid trade long after they should have died. They look like bloody skeletons with a few shreds of flesh hanging on the bones. In fact, they resemble corpses left hanging on gibbets (a traditional punishment for criminals).

Bloody bones lair in hidden caves or deep concealed pits. They venture forth only to kill and rob victims. At the sight of a bloody bones, a character must make a saving throw vs. spells or else suffer the

effects of a *fear* spell.

For the effects of damage vs. a bloody bones, treat the creature as if it were a skeleton (i.e., one-half damage from sharp weapons, etc.). The chance of a cleric turning a bloody bones is the same as the cleric's chance to turn a shadow.

In films such as *Jason and the Argonauts* and the various Sinbad movies, model-animator Ray Harryhausen created some spectacular special effects. One such special effect was that of skeletal warriors wielding swords and carrying shields. Ray Harryhausen's skeletons are fast and nimble, appearing to be more formidable opponents than the skeletons in the AD&D game. This has inspired a variant monster: the skleros. Skleros is Greek for dry and hard, and is a root for the word "skeleton."

SKLEROS

FREQUENCY: *Rare*
NO. APPEARING: 3-24
ARMOR CLASS: 5 (6 without shield)
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 1 + 1
% IN LAIR: *Nil*
TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
NO OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-8

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Non-*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Skleros are skeletons made from the corpses of highly trained warriors (fighters of 4th level or better) that still magically retain some of their past fighting skills. Their better armor class is due not only to the shields they carry but to their heightened dexterity (equal to 15). They usually fight with long swords. Because they "remember" many of their old fighting habits, skleros attack as if they had 2 hit dice; they would thus have a THAC0 (score to hit AC 0) of 16. Clerics have the same chances to turn skleros as they would zombies. While skleros have no treasure of their own, they often act as treasure guards.

A classic Walt Disney cartoon featured dancing skeletons, and animated skeletons often appear in cartoon features. Such skeletons not only dance but trade heads, fall into piles of bones, and reform into skeletons again. The skeleton variation herein called dry bones is inspired by the antics of cartoon skeletons. The name "dry bones" comes from the song of the same name ("The leg bone's connected to the hip bone," etc.).

Bloody Bones



DRY BONES

FREQUENCY: *Rare*
NO. APPEARING: 2-20
ARMOR CLASS: 7
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 4; *see below*
% IN LAIR: *Nil*
TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Nil*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Non-*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Dry bones are the same as skeletons with one important difference. They can only be destroyed when all their bones are pulverized or otherwise completely destroyed. Each dry bones has 4 HD (with 32 hp) but attacks as a 1-HD creature. A dry bones taking a total of 8 or more hp damage collapses into a pile of bones. After one round, the bones re-form into a skeleton and attack again. The process continues until the dry bones has taken a total of 32 or more hp damage in combat, at which point the dry bones falls apart forever.

Dry bones often masquerade as mere

piles of old bones, being able to dismember themselves at will until they are destroyed. Clerics have the same chances to turn dry bones as they would zombies. While dry bones have no treasure themselves, they often act as treasure guards.

Skeletons could be used as the undead repositories for enchanted magical items. The actual threat from such skeletons would come from the items carried, not so much the skeletons themselves. One simple but effective example of this is to give a skeleton a pair of enchanted gems for eyes. These gems would normally glow with magical light. As a general class, such skeletons could be referred to as "gem eyes." The actual creature names, however, would depend on the type of gem used for eyes (hence ruby eyes, diamond eyes, etc.).

GEM EYES

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: 1-12
ARMOR CLASS: 7
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 4 + 2
% IN LAIR: *Nil*
TREASURE TYPE: *Special*
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Spells*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Low*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
SIZE: M
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Gem eyes are special undead creatures created by powerful magic-users. Each skeleton has a pair of glowing gems for eyes, and each pair of gems holds one magical spell. The power of the eyes is linked to the "unlife" of the creature. Hence, the magical power leaves the gems when the skeleton is reduced to zero or less hit points.

The magic-users who create gem eyes take special care to make the skeletal life force stronger than normal (hence the 4 + 2 hit dice). The magic-user must be at least 11th level. Instead of animating 11 skeletons with an *animate dead* spell, the magic-user animates one gem-eyes skeleton with more hit dice. Theoretically, any magical spell could be put into the eyes (using *enchant an item* or *permanency*), but two factors limit the gems' magical power. The spells used in the gems are normally fourth level or lower; and spells tied to the "natural" power of the gem types are easier to make permanent.

When designing varieties of gem eyes, the DM may wish to refer to pages 26-27 of the *Dungeon Masters Guide* ("Reputed Magical Properties of Gems"). The following eight varieties of gem eyes are based

on a traditional system of magical symbolism that ties various stones to the so-called "Seven Magical Planets" (cf. *Occult Philosophy* or *Magic* by Henry Cornelius Agrippa, originally published in 1510).

Ruby eyes have the *burning eyes* spell, which is essentially the same as the first-level magic-user spell *burning hands* (except the flames radiate from the gem eyes instead of the hands). Treat the spell as if cast by a 9th-level magic-user (hence it does 9 hp damage). This power is usable three times per day.

Sapphire eyes grant luck to their animator, if within 60' of such a magic-user. All saving throws and "to hit" rolls made by the spell-caster gain a +2 bonus. This power has no set limit on duration, though it ends if the gem eyes is destroyed.

Diamond eyes have the power to double their movements and attacks, the same as the third-level magic-user spell *haste*, three times per day.

Amethyst eyes have the power to cast illusions, as per the third-level magic-user spell *phantasmal force*. Two such illusions may be cast per day.

Opal eyes can appear to duplicate themselves, as per the second-level magic-user spell *mirror image*. This spell may be cast three times per day.

Pearl eyes cause opponents to fall asleep, as per the first-level magic-user spell *sleep*, up to three times per day.

Obsidian eyes radiate darkness, as per the second-level magic-user spell *darkness 15' radius*. This power may be used three times per day.

Emerald eyes weaken opponents, as per the second-level magic-user spell *ray of enfeeblement*, by touch. This power may be used three times per day.

The magic of the gemstone eyes is so powerful that it temporarily endows these skeletons with limited intelligence (enough to cast the spells effectively). The treasure of gem eyes lies in the value of their eyes themselves; each gem is worth 1,000 gp. Gem eyes can be turned by clerics as if the creatures were ghosts. Any gem eyes turned away take their gems with them, of course.

If designing a unique variety of gem eyes, the DM should be careful which spells are put into the eyes. Since it takes at least a 9th-level magic-user to animate the dead, and an 11th-level magic-user to animate gem eyes, certain spells such as *fireball* or *lightning bolt* are simply too powerful for low-level adventures.

Electricity is a basic and primal force. It is easy to picture electricity as the power used to animate the dead (it worked for the cinematic Dr. Frankenstein). A classic biology experiment uses electricity to make a dead frog's leg twitch. If electricity is the force powering a type of skeleton, then combat can be unusual. Anyone hitting the monster with a metallic weapon, such as a sword, will both cause dam-

age and take damage at the same time. The safest way to strike the "shock bones" would be with a weapon having a wooden spoon handle, such as an axe or spear.

SHOCK BONES

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO APPEARING: 3-18
ARMOR CLASS: 7
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 1
% IN LAIR: *Nil*
TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
NO OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Electricity*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Electricity*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Non-*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
SIZE: M
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

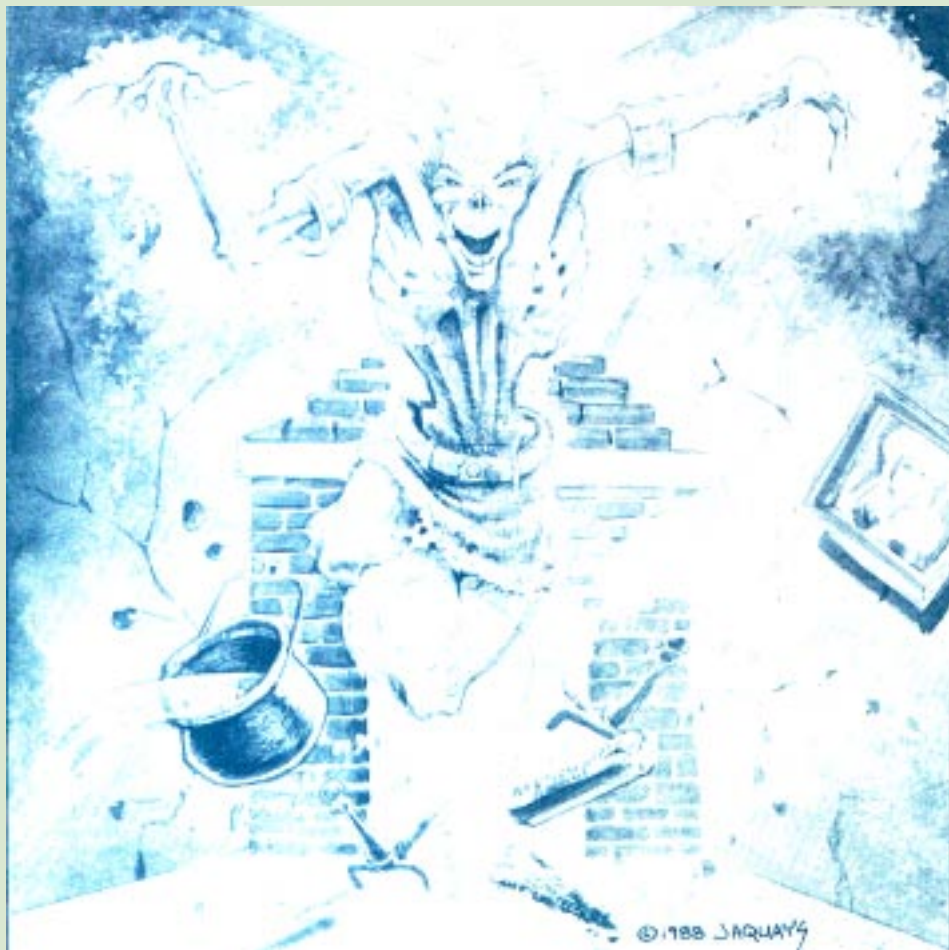
Shock bones are skeletons animated by both magic and electricity. Their attacks do damage from electrical shock. Anyone hitting a shock bones with a metallic weapon that conducts electricity automatically takes 2-12 hp damage. Clerics have the same chances to turn shock bones as they do zombies. While shock bones have no treasure themselves, they often act as treasure guards.

A shock bones might also be created by an alchemist or sage in a sort of Dr. Frankenstein-type experiment. Such a monster would not truly be undead, and though it would conform to the above statistics, it could not be turned by clerics.

A *variation* of a monster listing is one close enough to some other listing that it was probably inspired by the latter. An *affinity* is a listing that has some similarities to another listing, usually either in the visual description of the monster or some connection in traditional folklore. (When listing a monster name from one of the three books, (MM1) stands for *Monster Manual I*, (FF) stands for the FIEND FOLIO® tome, and (MM2) stands for *Monster Manual II*.)

Undead variations of skeletons include the huecuva (FF) and animal skeleton (MM2). A skeleton variation that is a normal monster is the crypt thing (FF).

Monsters with an affinity for skeletons include the bone devil (MM1), eye of fear and flame (FF), babau demon (MM2), and the galley beggar, an unusual ghost found mostly in the north of England. It was first mentioned in Reginald Scot's book: *The Discoverie of Witchcraft (1584)*. A galley beggar is a very thin spirit, often looking like a skeleton. Its main purpose seems to be to terrify anyone it encounters; in fact, the first part of its name, "galley," means to frighten or scare. Galley beggars have the same game statistics as do phantoms (Mon-



Galley Beggar

ster Manual II, page 100).

Ruth Tongue, in *Folklore Society County Publications* (vol. VIII), reports a headless galley beggar that used to toboggan on a hurdle down the hill between Over and Nether Stowey, his head tucked firmly under his skeleton arm and shrieking with laughter. It was only on dark nights that he rode, but a strange light surrounded him, and he would slide, yelling with laughter, right down into the street between the two villages.

The galley beggar is a ghost in the traditional sense and bears no relation to the ghost of the AD&D game. The DM can use a galley beggar in an adventure to make the skeleton guards of a treasure more effective (since only those characters who made their saving throws against fear could confront the skeletons).

Galley beggars favor strange, almost zany antics. Their senses of humor are both macabre and frightening. Including them is an easy way to add an unusual element to any adventure.

Zombies

Zombies are dead bodies brought back to a semblance of life by magic. They are little more than walking corpses. Zombies

are based on traditional voodoo myths, especially those from the island of Haiti. Voodooism is a strange combination of African and Roman Catholic beliefs, with a bit of American Indian lore and European occult practices thrown in. Voodoo is based on certain African religions whose practitioners believe they can temporarily be possessed by their various gods and goddesses. Voodoo has strong connections to sorcery, witchcraft, and magic.

A voodoo worshiper believes that the spirit of a god cannot take over his body unless his soul is first displaced. The soul is believed to consist of two spirits: the *gros-bon-ange* (big good angel) and the *ti-bon-ange* (little good angel). The *ti-bon-ange* is like a person's conscience. The *gros-bon-ange* is his essential soul, everything that makes him a unique individual.

Without the *gros-bon-ange*, the *ti-bon-ange* and the body lose contact. The *gros-bon-ange* is displaced during possession and also leaves the body after death. Great care is taken to provide the disembodied soul with a safe alternative dwelling place. The soul is recalled by the *hungan*, the voodoo priest, during a special ceremony and placed in a sacred jar. It then becomes an ancestral spirit that will advise and protect the *hungan's* family.

Zombies are created by *bokors*, evil

voodoo sorcerers. A bokor gains control of the *gros-bon-ange* of a dying person by sucking out the soul magically, trapping it in a magic vessel, or substituting the soul of an insect or small animal for the human soul. At midnight on the day of burial, the bokor goes with his assistants to the grave, opens it, and calls the victim's name. Because the bokor holds his soul, the dead person must lift his head and answer. As he does so, the bokor passes the bottle containing the *gros-bon-ange* under the victim's nose for a single brief instant. The dead person is then reanimated. Dragging him from the tomb, the bokor chains the dead person's wrists and beats him about the head to revive him further. Then he carefully closes the tomb so no one will notice it has been disturbed.

Led by the bokor and his assistants, the victim is first taken past his own home. It is believed that this trip will insure that the victim never again recognizes his home or tries to return there. Finally, the corpse is taken to the bokor's house or a voodoo temple, and there is given a secret drug. The drug may be an extract of poisonous plants like *datura* or *belladonna*, used by slaves in colonial times to kill their masters. The zombie is then a corpse-slave, held in thrall to the bokor.

The zombie walks with a distinctive shambling gait. It has an extremely low intelligence and can only follow the simplest orders, and it keeps its eyes down-cast. If it talks at all, it will babble gibberish in a nasal voice. Usually, the zombie does not answer if spoken to and is bereft of the usual marks of sanity.

One of the most sensational "true" zombie tales was related by Constant Polynice to William Seabrook, as recounted in his book, *The Magic Island*. The spring of 1918 was a big cane season for Hasco, the Haitian-American Sugar Company. The factory, which owned various plantations, offered a bonus for new workers.

One morning an old black headman, Ti Joseph of Colombier, appeared leading a band of raggedly dressed people who shuffled along behind him, staring dumbly like people walking in a daze. As Joseph lined them up for registration, they all stared, vacant-eyed like cattle, and made no reply when asked to give their names.

Joseph said they were ignorant people from the slopes of Morne-au-Diable, a roadless mountain district near the Dominican border, and that they did not understand the Creole dialect of the plains. They were frightened, he said, by the din and smoke of the great factory, but under his direction they would work hard in the fields. The farther they were sent from the factory, from the bustle of the railroad yards where most of the workers congregated, the better it would be.

Ti Joseph's workers were assigned to distant fields beyond the crossroads, and they camped there, keeping to themselves. In the evening, when each village group of workers gathered around one big common

pot of food, Joseph's group always had two pots, one for him and his wife Croyance, the other for the workers. The food made for the workers was tasteless and unseasoned — for, as Ti Joseph knew, zombies must never be permitted to taste salt or meat. Salt is generally believed to be the best ingredient to restore a zombie's memories, but it must be ingested.

One Sunday morning, Joseph left for Port-au-Prince as usual, with his pockets full of money. It was lonely in the fields with just zombies for company, and Croyance was filled with pity for the poor creatures. "Perhaps it will cheer them a little to see the happy crowds and processions at Croix de Bouquet," she thought. Since all the Morne-au-Diable people had gone back to the mountains to celebrate Fete Dieu at home, no one was likely to recognize a dead relative's face among the zombies.

When noontime came and Croyance sat eating savory dried herring and biscuits with a cup of wine, she pitied the zombies even more. They did not seem to be having any fun. Every day they worked faithfully in the cane fields and brought Joseph money, but the zombies got nothing. Then a woman passed by crying, "*Tablettes! Tablettes pistaches! T'ois pour dix cobs!*" Tablettes are a sort of candy with the size and shape of cookies, made with brown cane sugar. Sometimes they have pistaches (peanuts in Haiti) or have coriander seed. Croyance thought, "These tablettes are not salted or seasoned; they are sweet and can do no harm to the zombies just this once."

But the baker of the tablettes had salted the pistache nuts before stirring them into the dough. As the zombies tasted the salt, they knew that they were dead and made a dreadful outcry. Arising, they turned their faces toward the mountain where lay their own homes. No one dared stop them, and they shuffled out of town and soon disappeared down the path toward the mountain. When these walking dead drew near their own village on the slopes of Morne-au-Diable, the people of the village recognized among them fathers, brothers, wives, and daughters whom they had buried months before. Most of the villagers realized the truth — that these were zombies who had been dragged from their graves. But others hoped that a blessed miracle had taken place and rushed forward to greet the returned loved ones.

But the zombies shuffled through the marketplace, recognizing no one. As they turned left up the path leading to the graveyard, a woman whose daughter was in the procession of the dead threw herself screaming in front of the girl, clinging to the girl's shuffling feet and begging her daughter to stay. But the grave-cold feet of her daughter and the other dead tramped over her, and the zombies continued onward.

As the zombies neared the graveyard, they began to shuffle faster and then rushed among the graves. Each went to its

own empty grave and began clawing at the stones and earth to enter it again. But as their cold hands touched the earth of their own graves, the zombies fell and lay there, now rotting carrion.

That night, the people of the village, after restoring the bodies to their graves, sent a messenger on muleback down the mountain. He returned the next day with the name of Ti Joseph and a stolen shirt which had been worn next to Ti Joseph's skin. From the shirt, the villagers made a deadly *ouanga* fetish to gain their revenge. Just in case the *ouanga* was slow to work, they also set an ambush for the man. Soon afterward, Joseph was found on a lonely path. His head had been hacked off with a machete.

The most feared consequence of releasing a zombie from bondage is that the zombie will seek revenge before returning to the grave. The revenge could be merely physical, in that the zombie tracks down the bokor to kill him. The bokor could run or hide, but the zombie is tireless and will eventually find him. The zombie could even attack the bokor magically, turning the sorcerer's own magic against him.

Unlike most superstitions, zombie tales continue to be current. The late dictator of Haiti, Dr. Francois Duvalier, had a private army that was dubbed the *tontons macoute*, after the name of a kind of traveling voodoo magician. Many Haitians believed that some of the soldiers were actually zombies under the control of "Papa Doc" Duvalier.

Zombies are unnatural creatures to begin with. One simple variation of the listing is a zombie that must be literally chopped apart before it stops attacking. Even then, it can be a nuisance. Dismembered hands will grab victims; severed heads will bite. Such zombies might be termed "walking dead." Walking dead are superzombies, more difficult to stop than normal ones because they are both stronger and hardier.

WALKING DEAD

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 2-12

ARMOR CLASS: 8

MOVE: 6"

HIT DICE: 6

% IN LAIR: *Nil*

TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*

NO OF ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-12

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Nil*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *See below*

INTELLIGENCE: *Non-*

ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*

SIZE: *M*

PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Walking dead are undead animated corpses that keep attacking until completely destroyed. Like zombies, they are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, and cold-based spells. Their six hit dice represent

Lesser Colossus



their extreme tenacity. As the walking dead take damage, however, they become less effective (as they start losing vital parts of their bodies). For every 9 hp damage a walking dead takes (9 hp being the equivalent of losing 2 HD), it gains a -2 to hit and does -2 hp damage (minimum damage is zero hit points). Clerics have the same chances to turn walking dead as they do wights.

A classic modern horror picture with zombielike monsters is George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (which is part of a trilogy that includes *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*). In these movies, the man-eating zombies that stalk the night can only be killed by a shot or blow to the head.

This idea actually makes more logical sense in the AD&D game than it does in the movies. The life-force magically animating the corpse might be mystically contained in only one part of the body (something like a *magic jar* spell). The zombie would be invulnerable to all attacks except those against the area holding the animating force.

HUNGRY DEAD

FREQUENCY: *Rare*
 NO. APPEARING: 2-20
 ARMOR CLASS: 8
 MOVE: 6"
 HIT DICE: 2
 % IN LAIR: *Nil*
 TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
 NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
 DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-6
 SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Nil*
 SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
 MAGIC RESISTANCE: *See below*
 INTELLIGENCE: *Non-*
 ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
 SIZE: *M*
 PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

The hungry dead are undead corpses that return from the grave to feed off the living. Like zombies, they fight until destroyed or turned away, and are immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, and cold-based spells.

The return of the hungry dead is usually triggered by an evil magic-user or cleric. The animating force is always concentrated in one single area of the body. Except in that area, the hungry dead are immune to physical attack. The area of concentration is usually the head but at the DM's discretion could be any part of the body (heart, stomach, etc.).

Hungry dead look exactly like zombies. At first, however, "to hit" rolls of a natural 19 or 20 are needed to affect them (simulating an attack to one particular area of the body). After the first attack accidentally succeeds, the characters will realize the problem and try to aim for the vulnerable area; thus, all natural rolls of 15-20 will

	LESSER COLOSSUS	GREATER COLOSSUS
FREQUENCY:	<i>Very rare</i>	<i>Very rare</i>
NO. APPEARING:	1-2	1
ARMOR CLASS:	8	8
MOVE:	12"	18"
HIT DICE:	11 (50 hp)	33 (150 hp)
% IN LAIR:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
TREASURE TYPE:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	3-18	10-60
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Standard</i>
INTELLIGENCE:	<i>Non-</i>	<i>Non-</i>
ALIGNMENT:	<i>Neutral evil</i>	<i>Neutral evil</i>
SIZE:	<i>L (11' tall)</i>	<i>L (33' tall)</i>
PSIONIC ABILITY:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>

now hit the vital area.

Note that hungry dead do less damage per attack than zombies. Furthermore, such is their unnatural hunger that once a victim is slain, 2-5 hungry dead will stop attacking to feed on the slain victim. Hungry dead will not eat other undead, only fresh slain corpses.

Clerics have the same chances to turn hungry dead as they do ghouls.

In a story entitled "The Colossus of Ylourgne" by Clark Ashton Smith, the evil Nathaire created a terrifying giant undead creature. "The Colossus of Ylourgne" was first published in the magazine *Weird Tales* (June, 1934) and has since been published in hardback and paperback as part of the collection of stories entitled *Genius Loci and Other Tales*.

Nathaire was a powerful alchemist, astrologer, and necromancer. Working with his 10 students, he robbed a graveyard of all its corpses. In a kind of magical assembly-line, the corpses were stripped of all clothing, then the flesh and bones were separated into separate vats and rendered down to a pliable mass. All the bones were then reshaped and rehardened to form a huge skeleton. Finally, the skeleton was once again fleshed out. The separate ingredients were thus used to create a giant zombie. Along similar lines, the lesser and greater colossus herein may be added to the AD&D game.

A colossus is essentially a giant zombie magically made from many corpses. A lesser colossus is about 11' tall (between the size of a hill giant and a stone giant). A greater colossus is an amazing 33' tall (larger than the largest titan). Either one can rip up a whole tree to use as a club, doing double-normal damage. Otherwise, colossi use only their massive fists.

Colossi have the same invulnerabilities to magic and cold as do normal zombies, and they always lose initiative from their slowness. Holy water does 2-8 hp damage to

them. A cleric has the same chance to turn a lesser colossus as he would a mummy. The greater colossus is in the "special" category regarding turning it away by a cleric.

Note that the actual Colossus of Ylourgne and many other monsters and characters created by Clark Ashton Smith appear in the section on Averaigne, which is part of the D&D module X2 *Castle Amber (Chateau d'Amberville)*. While most sections of that module were completely made-up, the Averaigne section was based on the Averaigne stories of Clark Ashton Smith and was written with the express permission of the Clark Ashton Smith estate.

A skeletal version of this monster, the bone colossus, appears in the AD&D module GDQ 1-7 *Queen of the Spiders*, page 111. This colossus even regenerates its wounds!

Le Grand Zombi means "the great zombie." Le Grand Zombi would be a kind of king of the zombies. Unlike normal zombies, Le Grand Zombi would be intelligent and could even cast spells. It has been speculated that Le Grand Zombi is actually a kind of lich, the spirit of an extremely powerful magic-user/cleric who specialized in necromancy (magic dealing with the dead).

LE GRAND ZOMBI

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
 NO. APPEARING: 1
 ARMOR CLASS: -3
 MOVE: 9"
 HIT DICE: 13 (65 hp)
 % IN LAIR: 25%
 TREASURE TYPE: *E*
 NO. OF ATTACKS: 2
 DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-20
 SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Spells*
 SPECIAL DEFENSES: *+1 or better weapon*

to hit

MAGIC RESISTANCE: 25%

INTELLIGENCE: *Supra-genius*

ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*

SIZE: M

PSIONIC ABILITY: 200

Attack/Defense Modes: All/all

Le Grand Zombi looks like the worst moldering zombie. It is able to control all skeletons and zombies (and all their undead variants), being a sort of lord of the undead. Le Grand Zombi's main attack form is its ability to cast spells as if a 22nd-level magic-user/cleric. Instead of choosing 84 different spells, it is easier for the DM to consider Le Grand Zombi to have any first-through sixth-level magic-user or clerical spell it needs. Higher-level spells for Le Grand Zombi follow:

Seventh-level clerical	Seventh-level magic-user
<i> Destruction</i>	<i> Mass invisibility</i>
<i> Unholy word</i>	<i> Phase door</i>
<i> Wither</i>	<i> Power word, stun</i>

Eighth-level magic-user	Ninth-level magic-user
<i> Mind blank</i>	<i> Imprisonment</i>
<i> Power word, blind</i>	<i> Energy drain</i>
<i> Trap the soul</i>	<i> Power word, kill</i>

In addition, Le Grand Zombi has all the **monster summoning** spells (I-VII). The spells will only summon variants of skeletons and zombies as shown below:

Spell	Summons
I	2-16 skeletons
II	2-12 zombies, skleros, or shock bones
III	2-8 dry bones or hungry dead
IV	1-6 bloody bones
V	1-4 walking dead
VI	1-4 gem eyes
VII	1-2 lesser colossi

If Le Grand Zombi attacks physically, it does 1-20 hp damage, but it prefers to use spells. Le Grand Zombi can only be hit by magical weapons, has 25% magic resistance, 200 psionic ability points, and all psionic attack and defense modes. Le Grand Zombi is in the "special" class for a cleric's chance to turn it away.

Undead variations of zombies include the coffer corpse (FF), son of Kyuss (FF), juju zombie (MM2), and monster zombie (MM2). A normal monster variation of the zombie is the yellow musk zombie (FF).

Ghouls

The word "ghoul" comes from the Arabic word **ghul**, used to refer to a kind of demon of the wilderness. **Ghul** itself is derived from **ghala**, which means "to seize." In Oriental folklore, a ghoul is an evil spirit that robs graves and feeds on

the flesh of the dead. It is thought to be an inferior order of the jinn (jinnee or genie in the singular, djinni in the AD&D game). The jinn is a race of a variety of different beings created out of black smokeless fire. The usual dwelling places of jinn are ruined houses, water cisterns, rivers, wells, crossroads, and marketplaces. Iblis is the father of the jinn and their chief.

Ghouls inhabit lonely places, not only graveyards but also deserts and isolated mountains. In many ways, ghouls are the personifications of the terrors of the wasteland. Ghouls also personify the horror of starvation and forced cannibalism. In their true forms, ghouls are usually hideous and loathsome, with fangs and talons. Sometimes one may have only one eye or a set of wings growing out of its back. But ghouls generally share the powers of jinns, which not only include invisibility but also shapeshifting. Ghouls can thus take on the semblance of human beings and quite often do so.

Theoretically, a ghoul could be of either sex. Perhaps because of the strong patriarchal nature of Islam, in most tales the ghoul is a female. Sometimes the ghoul appears as a beautiful woman; at other times, it appears more like its true form — half-woman and half-fiend. In female form, the ghoul can even bear children. It is often represented as luring travelers out of the way to lonely and remote ruins, where it falls upon them suddenly and devours them, greedily sucking the warm blood from their veins and sharing the flesh with its children.

There are several tales of ghouls in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the classic collection of Arabic and Persian folktales (sometimes also titled *The Arabian Nights*). Two such tales are "The Story of the Prince and the Ghoul" and "The Story of Sidi Nouman." But the legends do not belong only to the remote past. Mathias de Giraldo recounts a story he was told in his travels about a more recent ghoul (*Histoire curieuse et pittoresque . . .* etc., published in 1846).

About the beginning of the 15th century, in a pleasant suburb of Bagdad, lived an elderly merchant and his only son. Having amassed a considerable fortune, the merchant naturally wanted grandchildren, and he decided to arrange a match with the daughter of an old friend. Unfortunately, the lady was far from comely. Upon being shown her portrait, the son, Abdul-Hassan, asked for a delay that he might consider the proposed union.

One evening, Abdul-Hassan was rambling alone by moonlight through the countryside near his father's house. While contemplating the impending marriage, he heard a voice of enchanting sweetness singing love lyrics with great skill and tenderness to the accompaniment of a lute. Following the music, he came to a small but elegant house. Unable to contain himself, Abdul-Hassan leapt over a garden wall and managed to hide in the garden.

From his vantage point, he saw a maiden of extraordinary beauty seated on the balcony above him. For most of the night he watched and listened, fascinated by her enchanting voice and dazzling charms.

On the following morning, Abdul-Hassan proceeded to make inquiries concerning the lady. Eventually, he learned that she was the only daughter of an eminent philosopher. Though the father's learning was profound, he had little wealth and could afford only the poorest dowry for his child. The lady, who was a paragon instructed in every art and science, was thus unmarried.

All thoughts of the prearranged marriage fled from Abdul-Hassan's mind. Instead, he told his father what had happened and begged that he might choose his own wife. The dotting merchant found it impossible to deny his son's request. The next day, he visited the house of the philosopher and made formal arrangements for the marriage.

After a brief courtship, the marriage was celebrated with much splendor. Several weeks passed in a state of extreme happiness — yet Abdul-Hassan noted that his wife Nadilla would never partake of an evening meal. She excused herself by explaining that she had become used to the frugal and severe diet forced upon her when she was growing up.

One night, however, after a few weeks had passed, Abdul-Hassan awoke from a deep sleep to find that he was alone in the bed. At first he took no heed, but he grew anxious as the hours passed. His bride did not return to bed until shortly before dawn. On the following night, he only pretended to sleep and carefully watched his wife instead. After she believed him to be soundly asleep, she quietly got out of bed, threw on a long dark cloak, and silently slipped away. Abdul-Hassan hurriedly dressed and followed her. To his surprise, she soon left the main streets of the town and made her way to a remote cemetery reported to be haunted.

Tracking Nadilla carefully, he saw that she entered a large vault. With the utmost caution, he ventured to steal a glance inside. The vault was dimly lit by three funerary lamps, and to his horror, he beheld his young and beautiful wife seated with a party of hideous ghouls, about to partake of a loathsome feast. One of these monsters brought in a corpse which had been buried that day; the corpse was quickly torn to pieces by the company, which devoured the reeking gobbets with every evidence of satisfaction amusing themselves meanwhile with mutual embraces and the drone of a mocking dirge.

Fearing to be caught by the ghouls, Abdul-Hassan fled back to his house as fast as he could. When his wife returned, he appeared to be soundly asleep. Throughout the whole of the next day, he gave no sign of what he had discovered. In the evening, as Nadilla was excusing herself

from joining him at supper, he insisted that she stay and eat; she steadfastly declined. At last, filled with anger and disgust, Abdul-Hassan cried out, "So then you prefer to keep your appetite for your supper with the ghouls!"

Nadilla turned pale; her eyes blazed, and she shook with fury. But she gave him no reply and retired to bed in silence. However, about midnight, when she thought that her husband was fast asleep, she exclaimed, "Now, wretch, receive the punishment for thy curiosity!" At the same time, she set her knee firmly on his chest, seized him by the throat, with her sharp nail tore open a vein and greedily began to drink his blood.

Abdul-Hassan managed to slip from beneath her. Springing to his feet, he struck her with a sharp knife with which he had been careful to arm himself. Nadilla fell down, mortally wounded, at the side of the bed. Abdul-Hassan called for help, and the wound in his throat was dressed. On the following day, the remains of his wife were duly interred.

However, three nights afterward, although the doors were locked, Nadilla appeared at exactly twelve o'clock in her husband's room. She attacked him with superhuman strength and ferocity, tearing at his throat. His dagger proved useless now, and his one chance for safety lay in speedy flight. Somehow managing to escape, he gathered a group of armed friends. Together they tracked Nadilla to the tomb where she was now living. Despite her strength and fury, the men managed to overcome the ghoul.

A great pyre of dry wood was built, with frankincense, aloes, and costly spices added. The corpse, writhing and foaming at the mouth, was placed on the pyre and reduced to ashes, which were collected and scattered on the Tigris River to be carried away and dispersed amid the waves of the Persian Sea.

Since so many ghouls are female in Arabic folklore, I have used **ghulah**, the feminine form of **ghul**, to refer to Oriental ghouls.

GHULA

FREQUENCY: *Rare*
NO. APPEARING: 2-20
ARMOR CLASS: 5
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 5
% IN LAIR: 25%
TREASURE TYPE: *E*
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-12
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Spells*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Very*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Ghulah are Oriental ghouls (especially of Arabic-Persian tradition). They usually appear as either beautiful women or hideous half-woman, half-monster creatures. Ghulah are evil kinfolk to djinn. They cannot be affected by *sleep*, *charm*, or *hold* spells. They have the power to cast the magical spells of *invisibility* and *polymorph self*. Clerics have the same chances to turn ghulah as they would ghouls.

While the roots for ghouls lie in Oriental mythology, the popular concept of the ghoul in fantasy literature and gaming has been strongly influenced by the writer H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft's ghouls are not evil spirits but a terrifying race of quasi humans who live in vast mazes of underground tunnels. The tunnel systems are, more often than not, under or near cemeteries and crypts. Ghouls only leave their tunnels in search of prey; usually they feast on corpses, but they are not above preying on the living.

Ghouls may once have been human, but their unspeakable practices have warped even their physical features. Other horrors live underground, mostly aberrant inhuman races that worship the Old Ones

— Lovecraft's bizarre alien gods. At some time in the past, the ghouls mated with some of these underground otherworldly races. The physical appearance of ghouls is both frightening and disgusting. An encounter with a ghoul can be enough to shatter the sanity of a normal person.

Inspired by H. P. Lovecraft, a number of writers have written horror stories with related backgrounds. These stories are generally grouped together to form the "Cthulhu Mythos" (so named because of the demon-god Cthulhu invented by H.P. Lovecraft). Most of the stories were written by friends and correspondents of H.P. Lovecraft in the 1930s, but recent writers have made their own contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos. The classic ghoul story by H.P. Lovecraft is "Pickman's Model," which can be found in the short-story collection entitled *The Dunwich Horror and Other Tales*. Ghouls, or the hints of ghouls, appear in other Lovecraft stories such as "The Rats in the Walls" (*The Dunwich Horror and Other Tales*) and "The Hound" (*Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*). The ghoul race and the hero of "Pickman's Model," Richard Upton Pickman, are also featured in the H.P. Lovecraft novel *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*. Other ghoul stories of the Cthulhu Mythos include "The Grinning Ghoul" by Robert Bloch (*Mysteries of the Worm*), "It Will Come to You" by Frank Belknap Long (*The Dark Beasts*), and "The Ghoul" by Clark Ashton Smith (*Other Dimensions*). Recent writers have continued the tradition of the ghoul in fiction with stories such as "Quietly Now" by Charles Grant, "Disturb Not My Slumbering Fair" by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro (both collected in *Necropolis*), and "Problem Child" by Brian Lumley (in *Vampires, Werewolves, and*

Other Monsters).

The AD&D game monster ghast is essentially a variation of a ghoul, derived from the word "ghastly" which comes from the Anglo-Saxon *gastlic*, literally meaning "ghostly." The word "ghastly" suggests the horror aroused by the sight or suggestion of death (a good choice for a root word when inventing a type of undead). Ghouls are tougher and have more powers than ghouls yet are so like ghouls as to be completely indistinguishable from them (except for their smell).

In the AD&D game, the ghoul marks a change in the game function of the undead. Skeletons and zombies threaten characters by sheer numbers. With ghouls, the emphasis begins to shift to the terrifying powers of the undead. Ghouls roam in packs, and their numbers can still be deadly. But their paralyzing touch is even more deadly and introduces an element of extreme randomness into combat. A string of lucky hits by the ghouls coupled with unlucky saving throws by the characters can suddenly decimate a party.

Ghouls have affinities both to zombies and vampires. It would be as easy to classify the hungry dead mentioned earlier as a ghoul instead of as a zombie; in some myths, ghouls return from the dead and drink blood besides eating flesh.

A type of ghoul found in Haiti is the baka. A baka is similar to a zombie with several important differences. The corpse which forms a baka belonged to a member of a secret magical society that practices ritual cannibalism. The cannibalism is believed to give the eaters magical powers and is a form of necromancy.

While a baka has to be animated like a zombie, the baka is no mindless slave. In the realms of death, the dead person has merged with certain evil spirits and now has their powers. This supernatural monster can bring luck, power, or wealth to its master. But the baka must be treated in the proper manner (which includes a steady diet of fresh corpses), or the owner will be destroyed by uncontrollable magical energy. In fact, the baka is often quite willing to return from the grave to continue the horrid practices of its life.

BAKA

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: 2-16
ARMOR CLASS: 6
MOVE: 12"
HIT DICE: 3
% IN LAIR: 10%
TREASURE TYPE: *C*
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACKS: 1-8
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Spells*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Average*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Baka are the animated undead corpses of members of a secret cannibalistic society. They have gained some demonic magical powers and have the clerical spells *command* and *hold person*. Baka can influence the luck of their enemies. Anyone fighting a baka has a -1 to hit, to do damage, and to all saving throws for the duration of the combat.

Baka are essentially a variety of ghoul, and clerics have the same chances to turn them as they do ghouls. Like ghouls, baka are immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells.

In Greek legends, the gelloudes are a kind of female demon that steals and then devours young children. The prototype for the gelloudes was the maiden Gello whose ghost, according to the ancient poetess Sappho, returned after her untimely death and was said by the people of the isle of Lesbos to have caused the early deaths of children. By the 10th century A.D., Gello had become a demon of the Greek Orthodox Church. Her various minions were the gelloudes.

Just as a ghoul is the personification of the wilderness and the fear of cannibalism, the gelloudes are the personification of the fear of infant mortality. In cultures without modern medical techniques, infant mortality can result in a 20% death rate. With one out of five children being born dead or dying soon after birth, it is not surprising that the cause was attributed to demons.

In Greek folklore, gelloudes have 12½ secret names. The names (transliterated from the Greek) are: 1) Guloy — a form of Gello; 2) Mora — a kind of lamia; 3) Budzoy — a sucker of blood; 4) Marmaroy — “heart of stone”; 5) Petasis — “fly like a bird”; 6) Pelagia — “swim like a fish”; 7) Bordona — “swoop like a hawk”; 8) Aplettoy — “insatiable”; 9) Khamodrakaina — “lurk like a snake”; 10) Anabardalaia — “soar like a hawk”; 11) Psychanaspastria — “snatcher of souls”; 12) Paidopniktria — “strangler of children”; and 12½) Strigla — a kind of stirge.

Gelloudes are related to lamias, stirges, type V demons, and succubi (all from MM1). While their prime purpose is to prey upon children, they are not limited to that function and are likely to attack anyone when the man-eating urge becomes too great.

GELLOUDES

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: 1-6
ARMOR CLASS: 7
MOVE: 6"/18"/12"
HIT DICE: 5
% IN LAIR: 5%
TREASURE TYPE: 1
NO. OF ATTACKS: 4
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1-4/1-4/1-6/1-6
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Energy drain*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Nil*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: 50%
INTELLIGENCE: *Average*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
SIZE: *L (7' tall)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: 100
Attack/Defense Modes: E/F/G

A gelloudes is a kind of demon, with the lower body of a giant serpent and the upper body of a woman. The serpent body has a pair of scaly legs with webbed talons. The woman's hands end in claws; she has vampirelike canines. A gelloudes has dragonlike wings that aid both flying and swimming.

Gelloudes attack with hand claws (1-6 hp damage each) and foot talons (1-8 hp damage each). If any attack succeeds, the victim is pulled close to the demon but is not held. On the next round, if it gains the initiative, the gelloudes can bite its victim (roll to hit at +2) and drain an energy level every round thereafter unless the victim breaks free of its bite, requiring an *open doors* strength roll. If the roll is not made, the victim can be struck on following rounds at +2 to hit with claws and talons (and automatically by the bite) until he breaks free. The victim gains no saving throw against the *energy drain*. As the victim loses energy levels, he seems to grow younger. When the victim has no levels or hit dice left, he dies.

This reverse aging is something of an illusion and is not necessarily permanent. If the victim dies from the attack, then the corpse will be that of a young child. If the victim can be freed before death from *energy draining*, he will immediately return to his normal age (the life-level loss is permanent).

As minor demons, the gelloudes rank in the “special” category when being turned by clerics.

One aspect of the topic of ghouls deals with creatures from the Negative Material plane that exist in spirit form. They seek to possess the material bodies of their victims and force them into ghoulish practices. The case of Constance Armande is related in Elliot O'Donnell's book *Werewolves*. It is supposed to have taken place in the French province of Brittany around the turn of the century.

A young girl named Constance Armande, much against the wishes of her family, took up spiritualism. At the seances, she evidently came into contact with earth-bound spirits of the lowest sort — murderers, lunatics, and worse. They attached themselves to her psyche and followed her back to her home, where they began systematically tormenting her. They rapped on walls and played similar poltergeist tricks. They invaded her dreams, causing her such frightening nightmares that she quickly feared sleep and would often wake up screaming. She told her parents that the evil spirits were trying to prevent her from waking, to keep her with them.

A spiritualist told her that her dreams were not dreams at all but projections. Constance had, at the seances, acquired the power of astral projection, but she had no control over the power and was being forced to project into areas controlled by evil entities. This projection was unconscious and usually happened during sleep.

A medical expert was consulted. His advice was that Constance immerse herself in recreation, seeing her symptoms as a kind of nervous breakdown. The girl went to the seaside for a vacation and attended all sorts of balls, concerts, and plays. But the annoyances and bad dreams continued.

Constance was a beautiful girl and had countless admirers. Eventually she became engaged to Alphonse Mabane, the only son of a wealthy widow. Shortly before the day of the wedding, Madame Mabane died of a stroke. Every one, especially Constance, was overwhelmed with grief. Preparations were made for an impressive funeral.

On the afternoon of the day before the funeral, Constance was struck with a violent headache. She went to her room to lie down in order to get rid of the pain. Two hours later, Madame Armande heard strange footsteps coming out of Constance's room and bounding down the stairs. Madame Armande ran to see who might be there and was astonished to see Constance — but a Constance she hardly recognized. Her daughter's eyes shone with beastlike ferocity, and a grim, savage expression distorted her face. She passed right by her mother without even noticing the woman. Her walk was a light, stealthy tread, utterly unlike her usual walk.

Madame Armande was too startled to stop Constance or even talk to the girl, who was gone before her mother could recover. Madame Armande told her husband what had happened, and he tried to find his daughter, but no one in the village had seen her.

About an hour before bedtime, there came a violent ringing at the front door bell. It was Alphonse Mabane, and he looked pale and ghostly.

“Have you found her?” Monsieur and Madame Armande cried, catching hold of him and dragging him into the hall.

Alphonse nodded. “Let me sit down a moment first,” he gasped. “It will give me time to collect my senses. My nerves are all to pieces!” He then proceeded to tell a horrifying story.

“When I heard that Constance was missing, I wanted to join the search for her. I was in my bedroom putting on my overcoat when my valet Jacques entered. His face was white as a sheet. He begged me to go with him upstairs, to the room where my mother was laid out ready for the funeral. We stopped outside the door. ‘Listen,’ he whispered, ‘do you hear that?’

“From inside the room came a curious noise like munching — a steady gnaw, gnaw, gnaw. We armed ourselves with

walking sticks and lights. Then, throwing open the door, we rushed into the room.

"The lid of the coffin was off, the corpse was lying huddled up on the floor, and crouching over it was Constance. For God's sake, don't ask me to describe more — the sounds we heard explain everything. When Constance saw us, she emitted a series of savage snarls, sprang at one of the maids, scratched her in the face, and before we could stop her, flew downstairs and out into the street. As soon as our shocked senses had sufficiently recovered, we started off in pursuit but have not been able to find a trace of her."

At the conclusion of Monsieur Mabane's story, the search was continued. The police were summoned, and a general hue and cry raised, with the result that Constance was eventually found in a cemetery digging frantically at a newly made grave. Brought to bay in the chase that ensued, Constance plunged into a river, was swept away by the current, and drowned.

A spirit-ghoul is a type of ghoul which is actually some poor unfortunate victim possessed by an evil entity. The entity warps the physical appearance of the person so that the individual looks like a ghoul. The possession attempt is a long drawn-out process and has no bearing in combat (i.e., the spirit cannot take over some other body during melee).

SPIRIT-GHOUL

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

NO. APPEARING: 1-6

ARMOR CLASS: 5

MOVE: 12"

HIT DICE: 3

% IN LAIR: 15%

TREASURE TYPE: *B, Q, T*

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 3

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Paralyzation*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: 20%

INTELLIGENCE: *Average*

ALIGNMENT *Chaotic evil*

SIZE: *M*

PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

A spirit-ghoul is the end result of a human victim's possession by unknown demonic entities. Once so possessed, the victim becomes immune to *sleep* and *charm* spells, and has *paralyzation* powers like normal ghouls. Such spirit-ghouls look just like normal ghouls, and the two can often be found together in a pack. *Exorcism* will work against a spirit-ghoul. A detailed examination by a high-level cleric will reveal the possession. Thus, unlike normal ghouls, a spirit-ghoul is not necessarily doomed to be a ghoul forever. In fact, if a spirit-ghoul is knocked unconscious but not killed, it can be bound so that the demon can later be exorcised. A character killed by a spirit-ghoul does not risk becoming a ghoul. Clerics can turn



Spirit-Ghoul

these spirit-ghouls as they can normal ghouls.

A monster related to ghouls is Black Annis. Her legend is part of the basis for the AD&D game monster annis (MM2). Black Annis is a man-eating hag with a blue face and iron claws. She is supposed to live in a cave in the Dane Hills in Leicestershire England. There was a great oak at the mouth of the cave in which she was said to hide; she would leap out from behind the oak to catch and devour travelers. The cave, which was called Black Annis' Bower Close, was supposed to have been dug out of the rock by her own nails.

On Easter Monday, it was the custom from early times to hold a drag-hunt from Annis' Bower to the Mayor of Leicester's house. A drag-hunt is an overland hunt in which the hounds follow the scent of a dead animal that has been dragged over the ground to make a trail. The bait dragged was a dead cat drenched in aniseed. The bait was symbolically important; aniseed is associated with the second part of Black Annis's name. Black Annis was also associated with a monstrous cat, a kind of pet or familiar. The drag-hunt custom died out at the end of the 18th century.

Ruth Tongue, in her *Forgotten Folk-Tales*

of the English Counties, reproduced a tale about Black Annis the hag, as told by an evacuee from Leicester in December 1941. The description seems to show that the tradition of Black Annis was still alive as late as World War II. The hag was said to be "ever so tall and had a blue face and had long white teeth." The hag ate people and only went out when it was dark. When Black Annis ground her teeth, people could hear her in time to bolt their doors. They kept well away from the windows, too, in case she reached inside and grabbed for villagers (which was why Leicestershire's cottages lacked a lot of big windows). When Black Annis howled, people could hear her five miles away. Even the poor folk who lived in huts fastened skins across the windows and put witch-herbs above them to keep Black Annis away.

Black Annis personifies the spirit of death and fears of the wilderness. It seems likely that she was once a goddess-figure that had to be ritually propitiated. Perhaps she was the dark side of Anu (Dana), a Celtic mother goddess. If so, it shows the staying power of memories of horror. The good aspects of the mother goddess (fertility, rebirth, and the cycle of the seasons) have been forgotten, and only the evil aspects remain.

Black Annis is a man-eating hag with a blue face and iron claws. Her cat is a giant cat, larger than a sabre-tooth tiger, having blue-black fur. While sunlight does neither Black Annis nor her cat any real harm, both of them prefer darkness and are normally encountered at night or in deep caverns.

Black Annis has the following spells: *darkness 15' radius*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic*, *clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *dig*, *confusion*, and *animate dead*. Her cat has three attacks (claw/claw/bite); Black Annis

for the whole winter.

In Canadian Indian myths, Wendigo was a terrifying creature of the wilderness. Part god and part monster, the giant Wendigo roamed in search of human flesh. The Indians believed that anyone who saw Wendigo and lived had been forever marked by him and was bound to turn to cannibalism. Even thinking about him or saying his name aloud was dangerous. Hence, Wendigo was often referred to by epithets such as "the cold one" or "windwalker."

WENDIGO

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
 NO. APPEARING: 1
 ARMOR CLASS: -5
 MOVE: 24"
 HIT DICE: 30 (135 hp)
 % IN LAIR: *Nil*
 TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
 NO. OF ATTACKS: 2
 DAMAGE/ATTACK: 3-30
 SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
 SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
 MAGIC RESISTANCE: 75%
 INTELLIGENCE: *Supra-genius*
 ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
 SIZE: *L (15' tall)*
 PSIONIC ABILITY: 250
 Attack/Defense Modes: All/all

Wendigo sometimes appears as a giant spectral being, part human and part animal, but his appearance varies because Wendigo is so chaotic that his body constantly changes. Everyone who sees Wendigo sees him differently, since Wendigo's form reflects a person's deepest fears.

In addition to his physical attacks, Wendigo can *summon* 2-24 ghouls, 1-6 ghastrs, and 1-3 wind walkers, one group each per day. Wendigo can use this summoning power once per turn until, after three turns, he has summoned each kind of monster.

Anyone looking at Wendigo must save vs. spells or be affected by *fear*. If the save fails, the person must make a second saving throw against death magic. If this second save also fails, then the individual becomes a servant of Wendigo and will be under his complete control. The control can only be broken by reducing Wendigo to zero or less hit points, slaying him.

In Greek folklore, the callicantzari are hideous, man-eating monsters that sometimes take on human form. They are described differently in different regions of Greece, but in general there are two main types of them: small and large.

The small callicantzari are not man-eaters, and are less hideous to look at and less numerous than the larger variety. In fact, the small callicantzari are closer in nature to the European faerie races than to any kind of undead.

The larger callicantzari are malicious and deadly. Their size varies from human-size to twice the height of a cottage. Usually, they are about 6-8' tall.

Callicantzari have dead-black skin. Most of them are covered with a coat of shaggy black hair, but a bald variety is sometimes mentioned. Their heads are huge, out of all proportion to the rest of their bodies. Their faces are dark black, and their eyes glare redly. They have the ears of goats or asses. From their huge mouths, blood-red tongues loll out, flanked by ferocious-looking tusks. Their bodies are generally lean and tall, but some are shorter and thick-set.

	BLACK ANNIS	HER CAT
FREQUENCY:	<i>Unique</i>	<i>Unique</i>
NO. APPEARING:	1	1
ARMOR CLASS:	4	6
MOVE:	15"	18"
HIT DICE:	11	9
% IN LAIR:	50%	50%
TREASURE TYPE:	<i>I,X</i>	<i>Nil</i>
NO. OF ATTACKS:		3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-12	2-8/2-8/2-16
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	<i>Spells</i>	<i>Nil</i>
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	50%	25%
INTELLIGENCE:	<i>Exceptional</i>	<i>Average</i>
ALIGNMENT:	<i>Neutral evil</i>	<i>Neutral evil</i>
SIZE:	<i>L (10' tall)</i>	<i>L</i>
PSIONIC ABILITY:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>

has only one, which could be either a physical attack or a spell. Black Annis is sometimes encountered alone, but her cat will be encountered only if the hag is also present.

Because of her close association with death, Black Annis could be considered an undead spirit seeking living victims. If so, she would be in the "special" category regarding turning. But Black Annis does not have to be a type of undead — she could merely be an evil spirit haunting the night. The final choice whether or not to make her undead is left strictly to the DM.

If ghouls personify the fear of the wilderness and Black Annis personifies the fear of death, Wendigo personifies the fear of cannibalism. The origin of Wendigo comes from the Indian tribes of Canada. The Canadian wilderness can be a terrifying place in the winter for people who have only a subsistence economy. Living by hunting is always a chancy life. There are times of plenty, but there are also times when game is scarce. During lean times, food can be gathered from the wild. During the winter, however, food is often unavailable. In the past, when there were few good methods of preserving food, there was the very real possibility that food would run out before spring. The problem was increased by the natural tension of people cooped up together

Anthropologists refer to the extreme fear of cannibalism, coupled with a kind of "cabin-fever," as Wendigo psychosis. They hypothesize that the fear itself, if it grew too great, might trigger a psychotic hallucination of Wendigo.

Indian myths of Wendigo were carried over into more modern Canadian folklore, though the single entity now became numerous creatures, half phantom and half beast, who live in the forests and prey on human beings, particularly children. These wendigos might be people who entered into a pact with certain evil spirits that lurk in the forest and help these people kill their victims. Perhaps these wendigos were humans gazed upon the mythical being Wendigo, as in the Indian myths.

The legend of this creature has been immortalized in Algernon Blackwood's short story "The Wendigo," first published in 1907. Versions of Wendigo have worked their way into some of the stories of the Cthulhu Mythos; in fact, the Old One named Ithaqua, the Wind Walker, is essentially a reworking of the Wendigo legends to fit into the mythos.

Like Black Annis, Wendigo is on the borderline between the undead and other kinds of monsters. Even if the DM chooses to consider Wendigo as undead, the monster would be too powerful to turn, so the choice makes little practical difference.

Callicantzari have the arms and hands of monkeys. Their nails are as long again as their fingers, and are curled like the talons of a vulture. Some have the legs of a goat or an ass, some have one human leg and one bestial one, and some have human legs with the foot so distorted that the toes come out where the heel should be. Hence, it is not surprising that these monsters are often lame, but even so, they are swift of foot and terrible in strength. They run with a peculiar shambling gait which, while appearing awkward, still allows them to run quickly.

Sometimes a callicantzaros (the singular form of callicantzari) appears to be a normal human; sometimes a callicantzaros appears in completely animal shape. In general, the callicantzari are neither wholly human nor wholly bestial but a blend of the two. It is possible that, in ancient times, "callicantzari" was a general term to describe animal-human combinations. Creatures like the centaurs, satyrs, and sileni (like satyrs, but part ass) were specific kinds of callicantzari. If so, the generic meaning has long been lost, and callicantzari has evolved into a term to describe specific monsters.

From dawn to sunset, the callicantzari hide in dark and dank places — in caves or beneath mills — feeding on the loathsome food there (snakes, snails, insects, etc.). But at night, they issue forth and run wildly to and fro, rending and crushing those who cross their paths. Destruction, waste, greed, and lust mark their courses.

Despite their uncouth shapes, the monsters delight in dancing. Sometimes a person can trick them into dancing all night. But people must beware, for the callicantzari delight in the taste of human flesh.

Fortunately, the callicantzari are stupid, gullible, and extremely quarrelsome. They have little discipline or sense of planning, which adds an interesting aspect of role-playing to an adventure as the PCs try to figure out ways to trick these monsters. A smart, alert person usually has no difficulty getting the better of them, as the following story from the island of Scyros shows (related in *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, by John Cuthbert Lawson):

A man of Scyros was returning home from a mill late at night, driving his mule before him laden with two sacks of meal. When he had gone about halfway, he saw before him some callicantzari in his path. Realizing his danger, he at once got upon his mule and laid himself flat between the two sacks and covered himself up with a rug, so as to look like another sack of meal. Soon the callicantzari were about his mule, and he held his breath and heard one say, "Here is a pack on this side and a pack on that side, and the top-load in the middle, hut where is the man?"

So the callicantzari ran back to the mill thinking that the man had loitered behind. But they could not find him and came



Wendigo

back after the mule, looked again, and said, "Here is a pack on this side and a pack on that side, and the top-load in the middle, but where is the man?"

So they ran on in front, fearing that he had hastened on home before his mule. But when they could not find him, they returned again, then went back a second time toward the mill. This went on many times.

The mule needed no one to guide it; it had traveled the path many times. While the callicantzari were running to and fro, the mule steadily trudged home. When the beast stopped at the door of the man's home, the callicantzari were close behind. The man called to his wife, and she opened the door and he entered safely.

When the callicantzari saw how he had tricked them, they knocked at the door in great anger. The woman, fearing that the monsters would break in by force, promised to let them in on the condition that they first count the holes in her sieve. To this they agreed, and she let the sieve down to them by a cord from an upper window. Straightaway, the monsters began to count the holes, and they counted round and round the outermost circle of holes in the sieve and so never got to the middle. Frustrated with the lengthy counting process, they only counted more and more hurriedly as a result.

Meanwhile, dawn was breaking. Soon the neighbors saw the callicantzari, and they hurried off to the priests and told them. The priests immediately set out with censers and sprinkling vessels in their hands to chase the callicantzari. The monsters fled right through town, spreading havoc in their path as they were hotly pursued by the priests. At last, when they were clear of the town, one callicantzaros began to lag behind, and by a great effort the foremost priest ran up to him and struck him on a hind foot with a sprinkling vessel. At once the foot fell off. The callicantzaros replaced it as best he could, but he got it on backward. Thus came about the phrase "callicantzaros foot," to describe their peculiar kind of lameness.

Callicantzari are on the borderland between the undead and other monsters. While the final choice of whether or not to make them undead is up to the DM, I have classed them as undead because, in legends, they operate only at night, can be scared away by unarmed clerics, take damage from holy water, are man-eaters, and traditionally appear only at the 12 days of Christmas — a time, like Halloween, when the barriers between the dead and the living are weak.

Callicantzari are a kind of undead mixture of animal and human traits. They have black skin and shaggy hair, oversized

Callicantzoros



heads with goat ears, and red eyes. Their feet are either animal feet or distorted so that the heels are where the toes should be. Callicantzari are big, stupid, malicious man-eaters that roam at night seeking prey. Daylight does not actually hurt them, but they will avoid it if at all possible.

The traditional leader of the callicantzari is the Great Callicantzoros. He has the power of *confusion* (as per the magic-user spell, usable three times per day); anyone who fails the saving throw against it will be influenced toward mindless destruction, greed, and lust as long as the Great Callicantzoros is within sight. Clerics and cavaliers of good alignment, including paladins, are immune to the *confusion*. Any other character of good alignment gets a +2 on the saving throw.

The callicantzari are hopelessly stupid and easily tricked. They often work at cross-purposes since they are incapable of organized action. The Great Callicantzoros, by himself, acts in an intelligent manner. But even he cannot exert enough influence to alter the stupid behavior of his fellow callicantzari.

Clerics can turn callicantzari with the same chances as they have against wights. The Great Callicantzoros cannot be turned, but he will flee if the majority of the callicantzari flee. Holy water causes 2-8 hp damage per vial against callicantzari.

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	CALLICANTZARI	GREAT CALLICANTZAROS
FREQUENCY:	<i>Rare</i>	<i>Very rare</i>
NO APPEARING:	2-20	1
ARMOR CLASS:	5	- 1
MOVE:	15"	18"
HIT DICE:	6	18 (90 hp)
% IN LAIR:	10%	10%
TREASURE TYPE:	D	I
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	2-12	6-36
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>See below</i>
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Standard</i>
INTELLIGENCE:	<i>Low</i>	<i>Very</i>
ALIGNMENT:	<i>Neutral evil</i>	<i>Neutral evil</i>
SIZE:	<i>L (6-8' tall)</i>	<i>L (10'tall)</i>
PSIONIC ABILITY:	<i>Nil</i>	<i>Nil</i>

Undead variations of ghouls include the ghast (MM1) and sheet ghoul (FF). Ghoul variations which are not undead include the psrudoghou (MM2) and the pseudoghost (MM2).

Monsters that would have an affinity to ghouls Include the carnivorous ape (MM1),

centaur (MM1), satyr (MM1), djinni (MM1), werewolf (MM1), minotaur (MM1), ogre (MM1), troglodyte (MM1), troll (MM1), succubus (MM1), type V demon (MM1), windwalker (MM1), yeti (MM1), annis (MM2), and kech (MM2).



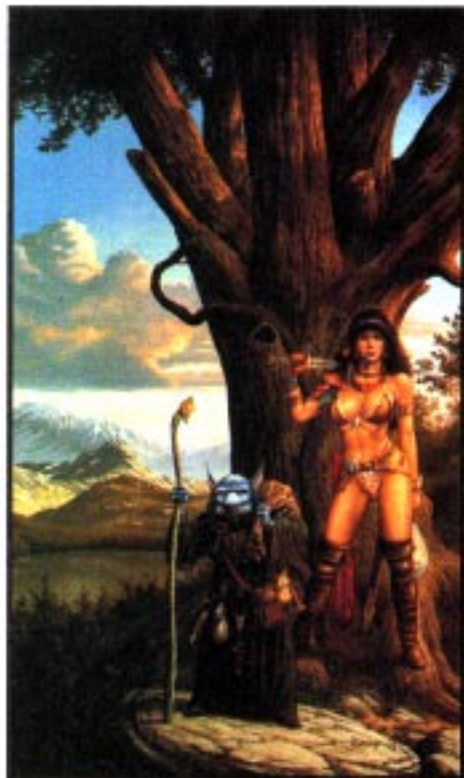
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**Halloween:
a time to summon friends**

Out of the Shadows...

... and into your campaign come three shady creatures



by Tom Moldvay

shadow: something without reality or substance; imaginary vision . . . a ghost; apparition.

New World Dictionary of the American Language

The shadow is an invented monster, one created specially for the AD&D® game and not directly based on traditional sources of mythology and legends (though its inspiration is there). The word "shadow" is sometimes used as a synonym for a ghostly apparition, so it is an appropriate name for a monster type. The gaming logic is elemental. In underground dungeons lit by torchlight, there will always be shadows. Why not have some of the shadows attack the characters every once in a while? A monster could thus be hidden in a room, in plain sight, to give characters an occasional nasty surprise.

In the history of the game, shadows were not always a sort-of undead. The monster was introduced in *Greyhawk*, Supplement I of the original, pamphlet-sized D&D® rules (now usually referred to as the "classic" edition of the game), by Gary Gygax and Rob Kuntz. In *Greyhawk*, shadows were described as "non-corporeal intelligent creatures . . . [that] hunger after the life energy of living things." They were, however, "not 'Undead' *per se*" (pages 34-35).

When Gary Gygax wrote the first *Monster Manual*, he decided it was more logical to make shadows a type of undead. Shadows became "horrible undead creatures . . . [who] . . . exist primarily on the negative material plane" (page 86). The change helped the cleric class by giving it another kind of undead that it could turn. The function of intelligent, malign, non-undead shadows was taken over by the shade in the *Monster Manual II*.

In the *Monstrous Compendium*, shadows

are still the undead of the original *Monster Manual*. They are merely described in more detail, in keeping with the AD&D 2nd Edition game format. For example, the usual details of shadow habitat, society, and ecology are included. According to the *Monstrous Compendium*, shadows "appear to have been magically created, perhaps as part of some ancient curse." The listing also gives a theoretical means for restoring PCs changed into shadows.

The dichotomy of shadows continues. The D&D® game is strictly based on the original ("classic") rules. When I edited the second edition of the Basic D&D rules, and Frank Mentzer edited the third edition of the same rules, we both kept shadows as non-undead monsters. Thus, in the AD&D game, shadows are undead; in the D&D game, they are not. The final decision whether or not to class the monster with the undead depends on the DM's needs. For some campaigns, having more sorts of undead is useful; for other campaigns, it is a hindrance.

The inspiration for shadows as undead monsters comes from Greek mythology. As Edith Hamilton, in *Mythology* (pages 42-43), notes: "In Homer the underworld is vague, a shadowy place inhabited by shadows. Nothing is real there. The ghosts' existence, if it can be called that, is like a miserable dream." This Homeric conception better fits the horrid existence of the undead than it does a true afterlife, as we think of it.

The realm of Hades in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* is not a pleasant place. The dead, mere shadows of their former selves, wander aimlessly through gloomy caverns, across cold wastes, and over meadows filled with pallid, ghostly flowers. The dead are forever alone, doomed to a phantom existence and trapped with their faded memories. Precise details of this netherworld are scarce, for few ancient writers cared to dwell on it.

One thing we do know is that all ghosts had an irresistible craving to drink blood. In the *Odyssey*, Homer described how Odysseus consulted the dead prophet Teiresias, once a holy man of Thebes. Following Circe's instructions, Odysseus sailed across the river Ocean, which encircled the world. On the far side he beached his ship on Persephone's shore, where stood the entrance to the dark realm of Hades.

Journeying deep into Tartarus, Odysseus and his crew took living sheep as sacrifices to entice the ghost of Teiresias to appear. Odysseus first dug a grave-size pit. He then killed the sheep and filled the pit with their blood. The ghosts of the netherworld rushed to the pit, thirsty for a drink. Odysseus and his men drew their swords and held off the massed ghosts until Teiresias finally arrived.

The dead prophet drank his fill and, as he did so, became more substantial and looked more like a living man. His full memories returned, and he was able to answer all of Odysseus's questions. Teiresias prophesied Odysseus's further wanderings, gave him sage advice (that was often ignored), and held out a ray of hope that, eventually, Odysseus would return home and be reunited with his beloved Penelope.

Later classical writers modified this primitive gloomy afterlife. They defined the world of the dead more clearly as the place where the evil are punished and the good receive their just rewards.

The allusion in classical mythology to ghosts as "shadows" is reflected in most dictionary definitions of "shade." The usual definitions of "the shades" in this sense is: "the world of the dead; nether world; Hades" or "the disembodied spirits of the dead, collectively" (*New World Dictionary of the American Language*). The Homeric vision of the dead also inspired the following undead monster for the AD&D game:

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the skotos (*skotos* is Greek for darkness or shadow).

The monster format used throughout this article, while essentially the same as that of the AD&D 2nd Edition rules, does differ slightly. These changes are used:

1. "TREASURE" lists both a percentage (the old "% IN LAIR" value) and a treasure-type letter. For example, "30% B" means there is a 30% chance the monster (if randomly selected) will be in its lair, and it has treasure-type B.

2. The subcategory of "Ecology" has been left out since such a category is essentially meaningless when applied to the undead, who contribute nothing to living ecologies.

Skotos

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: *Any usually subterranean*

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

ORGANIZATION: *Roving bands*

ACTIVITY CYCLE: *Night or darkness*

DIET: *Living beings*

INTELLIGENCE:

Average (8-10)

TREASURE: *5% E*

ALIGNMENT: *Any evil*

NO. APPEARING:

3-30 in wilderness;

1-10 in dungeons

ARMOR CLASS: *4*

MOVEMENT: *12*

HIT DICE: *5*

THAC0: *15*

NO. OF ATTACKS: *1*

DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-10*

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *None*

SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Hit points increase*

MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Special*

SIZE: *M (5-6' tall)*

MORALE: *Fearless (20)*

XP VALUE: *420*

Skotos are spirits that have broken free of the netherworld and now roam the world of the living as undead. They form hunting packs to better swarm over their

prey. Skotos look like pale, shadowy versions of normal beings. They can be of any intelligent race and any evil alignment, for only evil creatures would voluntarily leave the afterlife to prey upon the living.

Combat: A skotos is drawn by fresh blood, which it consumes. As it absorbs the blood, it grows stronger (it absorbs blood even from the wounds it inflicts in combat against living creatures). The skotos gains a number of hit points equal to the damage it inflicts in combat; thus, a skotos that hits for 8 hp damage gains 8 hp, up to its maximum hit-point total (40). Note that the hit points are not permanently lost by the victim, who still heals normally.

In a normal encounter, skotos as a group have a 75% chance to hide in shadows successfully and thus surprise their prey. Skotos encountered during or immediately after a bloody conflict will be so frenzied by the sight of blood that they will make no attempt at concealment, immediately attacking any living creature in sight. Intelligent prey is, however, preferred.

As with many types of undead, skotos are not affected by *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, or cold-based spells, nor by poison or paralysis. Holy water causes 2-8 hp damage to them per vial, and a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell will destroy a skotos. Any skotos reduced to zero hit points or less is forced back into the netherworld. A cleric's chance to turn a skotos is the same as for a ghost. Normal weapons will harm a skotos.

Habitat/Society: Skotos usually roam in bands composed of similar races and alignments, though different beings may band together in their common goal of feeding upon the living. Though they have escaped the netherworld, skotos generally inhabit places that remind them of it. Subterranean caverns and tunnels are preferred, although skotos bands will sometimes roam wilderness wastelands at night. While skotos are not harmed by sunlight, they dislike it intensely and will flee sunlight if at all possible.

Greek mythology is not the only traditional source for a horde of ghosts cursed

to eternal wandering. Gaelic (Scottish Highlands) mythology has tales of the *sluagh* (pronounced "slooa"), who are known as "the host of the unforgiven dead" or, more simply "the host." Descriptions of the *sluagh* vary, but most correspond closely to that given by Alexander Carmichael in the *Carmina Gadelica* (volume II, page 357). He noted that the "hosts" are the spirits of dead mortals. One informant told Carmichael that these spirits fly about in great clouds like starlings and return to the scenes of their earthly transgressions. On bad nights, say others, the hosts shelter themselves under russet docken stems and yellow ragwort stalks (two types of plants found in the Highlands). They fight aerial battles as men do on the earth, and may be heard and seen on clear frosty nights, advancing and retreating. After a battle, their crimson blood may be seen upon the rocks and stones. These spirits use poisonous darts to kill cats, dogs, sheep, and cattle. They can command men to follow them, and men obey, having no alternative. Such human victims slay and maim at the bidding of their spirit-masters, who in return treat them badly and without pity.

The picture of the *sluagh* that emerges is certainly full of horror. On a chill frosty night, one might see the host advance in the bright moonlight. Like fast-moving, low-lying storm clouds, boiling with iridescent blues and greens and reds as if the aurora borealis was trapped within, the host would wash across the night sky. Sometimes the rolling clouds would clash together and, when they did, bloody crimson rain would fall to stain the earth.

As the *sluagh* got closer, it could be seen that the "clouds" were actually masses of malignant bird-sized spirits. Each creature would look much like the negative photographic image of a sprite, with a dark shadowy body and iridescent wings. Each would be armed with a tiny bow with an equally tiny broad sword strapped to its waist. Trapped deep within the cloudlike host would be numerous zombies, magically born aloft and forced to obey every whim of the *sluagh* host.

Sluagh

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: *Cold or temperate/mountainous*

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*

ORGANIZATION: *Large roving bands*

ACTIVITY CYCLE: *Nocturnal*

DIET: *Living beings*

INTELLIGENCE: *Average*

TREASURE: *Nil*

ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*

NO. APPEARING: *10-100 in wilderness*

ARMOR CLASS: *5*

MOVEMENT: *3, F1 24 (B)*

HIT DICE: *2*

THAC0: *19*

NO. OF ATTACKS: *1*

DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-4*

SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Spell-casting, poisoned missiles*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Control of zombies*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Special*
SIZE: *S (2' tall)*
MORALE: *Fearless (20)*
XP VALUE: *975*

The sluagh (also known as "the host") are undead spirits who roam the night in packs, warring with each other and preying on the living. A member of the sluagh looks much like a black sprite, with a dark shadowy body and gauzy iridescent wings. Seen at a distance at twilight, a group of sluagh looks like a roiling thundercloud.

Combat: The sluagh fire tiny bows with poisonous arrows, having a maximum range of 75 yards. A victim hit by an arrow must save vs. poison or die in 2-5 rounds (unless the poison is *slowed* or *neutralized*). The save need be made but once only; any character who survives such a poison attack is thereafter immune to sluagh poison. The sluagh can also fight with tiny swords that do damage equal to daggers.

The sluagh can cast the spells *animate dead* and *fly*, one spell per round, as often as they wish. Any character slain by the sluagh is turned into a zombie and is then taken along when the sluagh fly away. The sluagh are usually accompanied by 3-24 zombies already under their control.

The sluagh need not make normal morale checks. At the DM's discretion, any time the sluagh turn a victim into a zombie they may choose to fly away. The sluagh exist in a state of barely controlled rage. When not tormenting the living, they are likely to fight among themselves. Tales are told of great aerial battles fought between divisions of the sluagh host. Characters can often turn this animosity to their advantage, as large numbers of the sluagh are easily tricked into fighting each other and leaving the characters alone.

The sluagh are not affected by *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*; or cold-based spells, nor by poison or paralyzation. They take 2-8 hp each per vial of holy water and are destroyed by *raise dead* or *resurrection* spells.

A cleric has the same chance to turn the sluagh as he has to turn ghouls. In the same round, allow the cleric a chance to turn the zombie accompanying the sluagh.

Habitat/Society: Sluagh always travel in large war bands, being the undead forms of warlike elves who turned on their fellow elves and were slain in battle. They appear only in the wilderness, never in dungeon settings. The sluagh never appear during the day and always flee sunlight. Their preferred habitat is any terrain similar to the Scottish Highlands.

The sluagh are sometimes led by other types of undead. For every 20 sluagh there is one wraith lieutenant. For every 40 sluagh there is an additional vampire captain. If 80 or more sluagh are encoun-

tered, their commander will be a lich. Note that special undead leaders make an encounter with the sluagh more deadly and should be used only if the characters are of an appropriately high level (with at least some chance of a cleric of their level turning the leader).

In many cultures, a person's shadow is linked to that person with strong magical bonds. In *The Golden Bough*, a classic collection of folklore written in 1922, Sir James Frazer discussed shadows on pages 220-222. He wrote that "the savage regards his shadow as his soul, or at least a vital part of himself. As such it can become a source of danger to him." If a primitive man's shadow was trampled, struck, or stabbed, he felt the injury as if it were done to himself; if the shadow was pulled away from him entirely, the man believed he would die. Magicians on the island of Wetar, said Frazer, could make a man ill by stabbing his shadow.

In the Banks Islands in the Canadian Arctic are remarkably long stones called "eating ghosts." because dangerous ghosts were believed to live in them. If a man's shadow touched one of these stones, the ghost drew his soul out so that the man died. Such stones were therefore set in houses to guard them. A messenger sent to a house by an absent owner had to call out the name of the sender to keep the watchful ghost from attacking.

When the lid was about to be placed on the coffin at a funeral in China, the bystanders stepped back or even moved to another room, to avoid endangering their health by allowing their shadows to be enclosed in the coffin. When the coffin was about to be lowered into the grave, bystanders stepped away so their shadows did not fall into the pit. Grave-diggers and coffin-bearers avoided these dangers by tying strips of cloth tightly around their waists to keep their shadows attached.

Animals, too, were believed to be harmed or to bring harm by means of their shadows. A snail from the hills of Malaya was believed to suck the blood of cattle through their shadows; the cattle grew lean and sometimes died from blood loss. It was once believed in Arabia that if a hyena trod on a man's shadow, it deprived him of both speech and movement.

If a shadow is seen as so closely tied to the life of a man that its loss means injury or death, the shrinking of the shadow is logically regarded with fear. In Amboyna and Uliase, two islands near the equator (where little or no shadow is cast at noon), local people did not go out of their houses at midday to avoid risking the loss of their souls' shadows.

The Mangaians told of a mighty warrior whose strength waxed and waned with the length of his shadow. In the morning, when his shadow was longest, his strength was greatest; as his shadow shortened toward noon, his strength ebbed, till it reached its lowest point at noon. As his

shadow lengthened in the afternoon, his strength came back. An enemy discovered the secret of this man's strength and killed him at noon.

Sir James Frazer also discussed customs practiced in his day (1922) in southeastern Europe. When the foundation of a new building was being laid in Greece, a cock, ram, or lamb was slain; its blood flowed on the foundation stone, under which the animal was then buried. The sacrifice was thought to give strength and stability to the building. Sometimes, instead of killing an animal, the builder led a man to the foundation stone, secretly measured his shadow, and buried the measure under the stone. The builder sometimes laid the foundation stone upon the man's shadow instead, which it was thought would cause the man to die within a year. Romanians in Transylvania thought that a man whose shadow was so entombed would die within 40 days; persons passing by a building under construction often hear a warning cry: "Beware lest they take thy shadow!" There were even shadow traders whose business was to give architects the shadows necessary for securing walls. The measure of a shadow was seen as equivalent to the shadow itself; to bury a shadow's measure was to bury the soul of the man whose shadow was measured (thus dooming him). The custom was a substitute for an older practice of sealing a living person in the walls, or crushing him under the foundation stone of a new building; this caused his ghost to haunt the place and guard it against enemies.

This collection of shadow-lore from *The Golden Bough* inspired the following monster: the ghost stone.

Ghost-Stone

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: *Any, often subterranean*
FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
ORGANIZATION: *None*
ACTIVITY CYCLE: *Shadow activated*
DIET: *Living beings*
INTELLIGENCE: *Average*
TREASURE: *50% E*
ALIGNMENT: *(Any) evil*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *3*
MOVEMENT: *None*
HIT DICE: *20 (stone only)*
THACO: *Not applicable*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *1*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-20*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Blood drain*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *None*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *See below*
SIZE: *L (10' tall)*
MORALE: *Fearless*
XP VALUE: *4,000*

Ghost-stones are just that: stones inhabited by ghosts. A powerful, evil individual may choose to send his malicious spirit into a specially prepared stone upon his



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death. The person prefers an undead existence to risking the punishments of the netherworld. The ghost-stone is often placed so that it guards the treasure the evil person hoarded in life; the treasure may actually be concealed within the stone itself.

Combat: If the shadow of a character falls upon a ghost-stone, that person is trapped. The individual can still fight and cast spells, but is unable to move more than 10' away from the stone. The ghost-stone uses the shadowy connection to drain the victim's blood, doing 1-20 hp damage per round automatically.

There are two ways to destroy a ghost-stone. If the stone holding the evil ghost is completely hacked apart, the spirit is forced to depart and undertake its long delayed journey to the netherworld. An *exorcism* spell has the same effect.

The ghost in the stone can be pacified if its name is known. A simple command of: "[Ghost's true name] be still, and at peace" calms the angry spirit even if its treasure is taken. In a campaign, the DM has the option of revealing the ghost's name to the PCs, perhaps making the answer a puzzle or riddle.

Since ghost-stones look like any other stones, they normally attack with surprise. The first indication of trouble is when a character's shadow gets automatically trapped. If the characters have some rea-

son to be suspicious of that particular stone, the DM should allow a saving throw vs. wands to the PC.

Any character who strikes the ghost-stone physically, without first choosing an attack angle that guarantees that his shadow will not fall upon the stone, could end up trapped also. Each person in addition to the first gains a saving throw vs. wands to avoid entrapment. Only one person at a time will be drained of blood, however. Other trapped individuals are simply unable to move away. If the ghost-stone survives attacks against it, it eventually drains all of its victims of blood.

A cleric has the same chance to turn away the spirit in a ghost-stone as he has to turn a ghost. If turning is successful, the ghost-stone releases all victims currently being held. It will not attack unless it is itself attacked, or if a character tries to steal the treasure the ghost-stone is guarding.

(Note that the "Habitat/Society" category is meaningless for the ghost-stone.)

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**You can run—
but you'll only die tired**

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Beyond the Grave

The legends and lore of the wight, wraith, and mummy

by Tom Moldvay

Artwork by Tom Baxa

Tom Moldvay has done three previous articles on the world of the undead: "Out of the Shadows," in DRAGON® issue #162; "The Ungrateful Dead," in DRAGON issue #138; and "Hearts of Darkness," in DRAGON issue #126. We welcome him back to our pages with a new installment of his menagerie of horror.

Wight is a general Germanic word meaning "being" or "creature." Over the years, it increasingly came to be applied to either good or bad spirits, until it came to have a supernatural connotation.

In late Saxon, "unsele wiht" means "uncanny creature." In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer uses the word for dangerous spirits in the phrase, "I crouche thee from elves and from wightes," in "The Miller's Tale." English minister Robert Kirk, in *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* (1691), talks of seeing the fairies crowding in from all quarters "like furious hardie wights."

Wight is not a word objected to by the elves, for in the fairy rhyme given by Robert Chambers in *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*:

But gin ye ca' me seelie wicht,
I'll be your freend baith day and nicht.

A "seelie wicht" would be a good wight, a member of the Seelie Court that rules the good fairies. An elf would make objection to being called an "unseelie wicht," an "evil wight" who pays homage to the Unseelie Court of the evil fairies.

Like most things supernatural, wights, in

the course of time, ceased to be viewed as having any good and were seen as strictly evil. Wights became wicked beings that came out of the darkness. As such it was easy to make wights undead creatures. J. R. R. Tolkien used a similar jump of the imagination for the "barrow wight" Frodo runs into in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In TSR's D&D® and AD&D® games, wraiths are essentially more powerful wights. The derivations of the two words are similar. Wight comes from the Anglo-Saxon "wiht"; wraith comes from the lowland Scots (i.e., English-speaking) "warth," which can ultimately be traced back to the Old Norse "vorthr," from "vartha": to ward or guard. Both words are part of the larger British category of folklore. Tolkien recognized the affinity between the words when he used "ring-wraiths" for the horrid beings that ceaselessly hunt for the One Ring.

The word "mummy" is borrowed from the French "mumie," which in turn is derived from the Arab "mumiya," which denotes an embalmed body. The word entered the language as a result of Napoleon's 1798 campaign to Egypt, which created a European—indeed, worldwide—craze for the ancient Egyptians. The undead mummies in AD&D games owe much to the legends surrounding Egyptologists, and even more to certain "B" movies.

While wights, wraiths, and mummies have different derivations, they share one thing in common: the primitive belief that the body somehow lives on inside the tomb. This belief is most clearly seen in early Egyptian burial beliefs.



It started in Egypt...

In ancient Egyptian belief, there were two main spiritual forms of the deceased, called respectively the *ka* and the *ba*. The *ka* was supposed to dwell in the tomb—more precisely, in the mummified body—and it was the form in which the dead received their funerary offerings.

It seems that the *ka* represented the life-force of an individual. It was created at the time of his birth, remained with him throughout his life, and subsequently lived in the tomb after death. The dead were sometimes referred to as “those who have gone to their *kas*,” and the tomb chapel could be called, “the house of the *ka*.” Ordinary people had only a single *ka* but gods and pharaohs had several.

The importance of preserving the corpse can be seen through the *ka* belief. The more intact the corpse, the better the home for the *ka* spirit. The great pyramids and other tomb structures of ancient Egypt served primarily not as monuments but as houses in which the *kas* spent their afterlife. The richer and more important an individual, the better he wanted his death-home to be, and pharaohs were the most important individuals of all.

Thus it was believed that the dead lived on in the tomb. This belief may have originated in earlier burials, which took place in the desert away from the Nile. The desert dried the corpses and helped preserve them. At the same time, the liquefaction that accompanies corruption would be drained off into the sands. A sandstorm could easily uncover earlier graves, exposing the contents. The Egyptians would chance upon a body that had been buried for centuries and find it better preserved than a corpse left out near the Nile for several days. It is not surprising that a belief arose that the dead lived on in their tombs.

Once such a belief became established, one obvious result was the desire to build the best possible resting place for a beloved family member. Burial chambers grew more and more elaborate. For a time, huge pyramids were built to house pharaohs, who were the sons of the sun god. Such an extensive building effort could not be maintained for long. Later tombs became less grandiose than the pyramids. Still, such tombs, cut into solid rock in the Valley of the Kings, were elaborate affairs.

Pharaohs and nobles could afford elaborate tombs. Others had to settle for simpler graves. Yet every effort was made to ensure the well-being of the dead in their afterlife.

The articles used by the living were included in their death goods. Clothing, tools, weapons, cosmetics, even games were entombed with the dead. Complete meals were laid out to be buried with the corpse for future use. Funerary rites, conducted by priests, insured a continuing supply of the things that made living pleasant.

Each tomb, sarcophagus, or coffin had a

stylized door outline carved into it by which the deceased could leave to pick up offerings, then reenter the tomb. The *ka* could literally walk through stone or wood once the appropriate magic had been performed. Such an action was possible because the deceased was now a spirit and the door was a magical spirit door, not a real one.

At first, grave goods were literal. Baskets of food, whole chariots, favored horses, household slaves, and the like were entombed with rich pharaohs. Such gifts were, of course, expensive. It was impossible to include them in every burial without begging the nation.

Magic came to the rescue. The same grave goods could be included in miniature, or merely painted on the wall. Hence tombs might contain a set of miniature servants or soldiers, miniature boats and chariots, even miniature food baskets. Likewise, the scenes painted on the walls were not for decoration or art, but to magically supply the dead person with goods and services in the afterlife. Thus there would be painted scenes showing the preparation of every stage of food from planting or hunting to the final cooking and serving.

A particular style evolved that concerned itself more with the essence of things than with a naturalistic presentation. A profile included a whole enlarged eye to show how important sight was. A pharaoh was drawn larger than nobles who were, in turn, larger than servants, thus continuing in death the distinctions made in life.

The final stage in the logical progression of the magic was to merely write the items on the tomb wall, or on papyrus lists that could be entombed with the dead. Egyptian writing, which had evolved from pictographs, was itself viewed as magical. To chisel a name, paint it, or merely write it down was not simply to name a person or thing, but to conjure it magically into the presence of the tomb for all time.

Naturally, steps were taken to discourage tomb robbery. Such robbery deprived the dead of goods for all eternity. Some traps were incorporated into the tomb, but the Egyptians relied more on curses, written on the tomb wall. Again, such writing was considered magical, and the effects of the spell would last as long as the markings survived.

No matter how well the Egyptians mummified their dead, bodies could decay. To counter this effect, the priests evoked more magic. Life-size statues were included in the tombs. The *ka* could use these statues as alternative homes. Detailed paintings of the individual and special face masks served the same purpose, as extra homes for the *ka*. As a last resort, the individual's name was carved on rock or otherwise written repeatedly. If there was no place else to go, a *ka* could inhabit the carved or written name.

Thus, the worst curse an Egyptian could

think of was to destroy the statues of a person and to remove his name from every reference. Such an individual would be cursed to wander eternally in spirit form, never to be at rest or enjoy the afterlife.

The second spiritual manifestation of an individual, the *ba*, was usually represented as a human-headed bird. This spirit was thus able to fly from the corpse. It left the body at the time of death and was free to travel. In early beliefs, it rode with the sun god during the day and had to return to dwell with the *ka* at night. In later beliefs, the *ba* journeyed to the otherworldly domain of Osiris to be judged and (presumably) enjoy an afterlife.

Monster notes

The monster format used throughout this article, while essentially the same as that of the AD&D 2nd Edition rules, does differ slightly. These changes are used:

1. “TREASURE” lists both a percentage (the old “% IN LAIR” value) and a treasure-type letter. For example, “50% A” means there is a 50% chance the monster (if randomly selected) will be in its lair, and it has treasure type A.

2. The subcategory of “Ecology” has been left out since such a category is essentially meaningless when applied to the undead, who contribute nothing to living ecologies.

Ka

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Desert, rivers, subterranean

FREQUENCY: Very rare

ORGANIZATION: Solitary or small bands

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Night

DIET: Spirit food

INTELLIGENCE: Average to Genius (8-18)

TREASURE: 50% A

ALIGNMENT: Lawful neutral

NO. APPEARING: 1 or 2-12

ARMOR CLASS: 1

MOVEMENT: 9

HIT DICE: 9 + 6

THAC0: 11

NO. OF ATTACKS: 1

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2d10

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Fear, spellwriting, curse, statue animation

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Weapon resistances, spell immunities and resistances, spirit doors

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: M (5'-7')

MORALE: Fearless (20)

XP VALUE: 14,000

A *ka* is a kind of super-mummy. Once, the *ka* was a noble, king, or pharaoh. After death, the mummified body continued to live on in the tomb as an undead monster. A *ka* is not necessarily evil. It attacks only when its tomb offerings are threatened or when under the control of a cleric. A *ka* looks like a normal mummy—i.e., as a

bandage-wrapped corpse.

- Combat:** Like a normal mummy, a ka possesses supernatural strength that lets its blows do more than normal damage. Instead of a rotting disease, however, a successful hit by a ka imparts a curse upon the victim. DMs may make up their own curses or may use the following table (roll 1d20; all curses last until removed):
- 1-3: *Ill luck.* All future rolls for the cursed individual are -1 on a roll of 1, -2 on a roll of 2, or -3 on a roll of 3.
 - 4-7: *Withering touch.* An arm or leg withers and becomes useless. (4 = right arm, 5 = left arm, 6 = right leg, 7 = left leg; loss of a leg reduces movement by 3).
 - 8-11: *Mutation.* A body part becomes mutated to some other form (8 = a leg, 9 = torso, 10 = an arm, 11 = head).
 - 12-14: *Alteration.* An attribute chosen at random is lowered by -1.
 - 15-18: *Death wish.* Extra damage is received in subsequent attacks. (15 = +1, 16 = +2, 17 = +3, 18 = double damage).
 - 19-20: *Cursed item.* One magical item,

chosen at random, loses its benefits on a 19 (as per *cancellation*). On a 20, the item actually becomes cursed (use the closest appropriate cursed item from the Treasure Tables; hence a *sword* +3 would become a *cursed sword* -2).

As with mummies, the mere sight of a ka may cause *fear* and *revulsion* in any creature. A save vs. spells must succeed or the victim will be *paralyzed* with fright for 1-6 melee rounds. There are no bonuses to the die roll.

A ka can be harmed only by magical weapons, which do only half normal damage. *Sleep, charm, hold, cold, poison, paralysis, polymorph, and electricity* do not harm it. It suffers only half damage from fire or holy water. A *raise dead* spell turns a ka into a normal human (of 10th-level fighting ability) unless the ka saves vs. spells.

A ka has a limited magical ability. A word written by it has the force of a *command* spell. It takes a full round to inscribe such a word. Characters need not see the written word for the spell to take effect.

The ka is able to fragment its spirit.

These spirit fragments can inhabit special magical stone statues within the ka's tomb. Treat these statues as stone golems. A ka can inhabit 1-4 statues at a time. If the ka's mummified body is destroyed, its will lives on in the statues. Inside a statue, however, a ka no longer possesses its *curse* or *magical writing* powers, and it may be affected by forms of attacks to which the mummified body is immune. Note that the ka has no power to activate any other statue but those in its tomb.

A ka may also walk through special spirit doors carved into stone or wood or painted on a wall when the body was buried. A ka could walk through a spirit door carved into rock, attack the party, then retreat back inside its tomb.

A cleric has the same chance to turn a ka as he does a vampire.

Habitat/Society: A ka was once a living ruler. It still retains some friendliness toward character races, especially members of its own race and nation. Thus a human ka has an affinity for humans, a dwarven ka for dwarves, etc. This affinity is even stronger if, in the DM's opinion, the ka and character share the same cultural background.

If no attempt is made to steal its tomb treasures, a ka may be placated by showing it reverence and giving it additional grave goods. Such goods may vary from simple food to elaborate treasures. At the DMs discretion, a ka that has become placated may be asked questions that require simple yes-or-no answers. The greater the offerings, the greater the knowledge such a ka may impart.

Wealthy individuals are usually buried alone. A ka is, hence, generally encountered as a solitary creature. Sometimes, however, many graves are crowded into one tomb to discourage robbers. In this case, the tomb is shared by a related group of kas.

Grettir and the ghost of Glam

In *Grettissaga*, a tale from Iceland, another kind of undead corpse walks the earth. Grettir, known as the Strong, was a man during Viking times who came to be outlawed for killing too many men in a blood feud. He spent most of his life as an outlaw until he was finally slain. His exploits, while historically based, contain a strong element of supernatural legend. Grettir's story was retold by succeeding generations and finally written down during medieval times:

There was a man in Iceland, named Thorhall Grimsson, who had difficulty keeping shepherds. Some were injured and others could not finish their work, for some evil being stalked the pastures. So Thorhall hired Glam, a big strong man. Glam feared nothing, but he was often disliked for his strong temper.

Glam commenced his work as a shepherd. He had a loud, hoarse voice. He



abstained from mass, had no religion, and was stubborn and surly. Everyone hated him-but he lost no sheep.

The time passed 'til the eve of Yuletide. Glam was warned that, out of reverence, it was not proper to eat on the day before Yule. He demanded food anyway. When he had eaten, Glam went out.

It was very dark. There was driving snow, the wind was howling, and it became worse as the day wore on. In the evening, Glam did not return. Only after the violent storm passed could people search for him.

On the track above the valley, the searchers found Glam. The stones and earth were torn up all about from a violent struggle. Glam was dead; his body was black and swollen to the size of an ox. The people believed that the evil spirit that had been slaying sheep had also slain Glam. Glam was too heavy to drag to the church, so he was rolled into a nearby gully and covered with a cairn of stones.

It was not long before men became aware that Glam was uneasy in his grave. Many men were attacked. Some were severely injured; others were struck senseless and lost their wits. At night, the walking corpse would try to break into houses. Soon Thorhall's cowherd was slain by the ghost. The panic was great; the district was in a grievous condition.

A foreigner named Thorgaut then came to Thorhallsstad as a shepherd. He did not fear Glam's ghost, and he laughed at the stories. One day Thorgaut went out to the sheep and did not return. The men found his body on top of Glam's cairn. Thorgaut's neck was broken, as was every bone in his body.

Glam became worse than ever. People fled the district. Thorhall's steading was almost deserted. Livestock left behind was killed by the restless spirit.

Grettir the Strong then rode to Thorhallsstad, where he was welcomed, Grettir said he wished to spend the night in Thorhall's stead if the *bondi* permitted. Thorhall said he would indeed be thankful to Grettir for staying there.

When about a third part of the night had passed, Grettir heard a loud noise. Something was around the house, riding above the hall and kicking the wood with its heels. This went on for some time when the sound came down toward the door. The door opened and Grettir saw Glam, bloated and black, with an enormous ugly head like a goblin.

Grettir sprang under the ghost's arms, seized it around the waist, and squeezed Glam's back with all his might. Glam managed to wrench free. The monster sought to flee, but Grettir prevented flight. A fight raged up and down the hall, benches flew, and everything was scattered. Glam, with a desperate effort, forced Grettir to the porch.

Grettir changed tactics and loosed his hold on the monster. Glam was not prepared for that; he reeled backward and

tumbled hind-foremost out of the door, tearing away the lintel with his shoulder and shattering the roof.

The monster turned its eyes at Grettir and stared. The sight of Glam in the moonlight made Grettir's heart sink. Grettir could tell that Glam possessed more malignant power than any creature the hero had ever faced.

Then Glam spoke: "You shall possess only half the strength and firmness of heart that were decreed to you because of this night's battle. Henceforward there shall fall upon you exile; your deeds will turn evil and your guardian spirit shall forsake you. You shall be outlawed, and your lot shall be to dwell ever alone."

The faintness that had come over Grettir left him. He drew his sword and cut off Glam's head. Then he and Thorhall set to work and burned Glam to cold cinders, bound the ashes in a skin, and buried them far from the haunts of man or beast. Yet, in the years to come, Grettir found that the curse of Glam would, indeed, unfold.

Angreden

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any, especially sub-arctic and subterranean
FREQUENCY: Rare
ORGANIZATION: Solitary or small bands
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Night
DIET: Nil
INTELLIGENCE: Average
TREASURE: 20% B
ALIGNMENT: Any evil
NO. APPEARING: 1 or 2-16
ARMOR CLASS: 5
MOVEMENT: 12
HIT DICE: 4 +4
THAC0: 14
NO. OF ATTACKS: 1
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1d6 + 2
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Enfeeblement, fear
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to some spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: M (5'-7')
MORALE: Fearless (20)
XP VALUE: 1,400



An *angreden*, based on Middle-English form, would mean "the state or condition of anger" or "filled with anger." An *angreden* is the walking corpse of an individual who died under a curse, or who was so filled with hatred and anger in life that he refused to lie still in his grave. An *angreden* has a blackened, bloated body with a huge, oversized head.

Combat: An *angreden* is considered to have 18 Strength, so it gets a +1 to attack and +2 to damage in combat, which has already calculated into its statistics. Its touch acts like an *enfeeblement* spell. Victims of a successful hit must make a save vs. spells or temporarily lose 25% of their Strength scores (fractions rounded down). The gaze of an *angreden* acts as a *fear* spell. An *angreden's* attacks are unsophisticated, being physical attacks with a club or hand-held rock.

An *angreden* is immune to *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, cold, poison, paralysis, and death magic. A *raise dead* spell destroys it. A cleric has the same chance to turn an *angreden* as he does a *wight*.

Habitat/Society: An *angreden* has trouble getting along with everyone, even after death. It is often solitary but may sometimes band with others for protection. Such bands are a snarling, quarrelsome lot.

An *angreden* may be lawful, neutral, or chaotic, but will always be evil. It exists only to vent its insensate rage at the world. It delights in harm for its own sake and, when not killing, will try to smash everything in sight.

Note: Strictly as a plot suggestion, DMs may wish to give an *angreden* the power to *curse* before being destroyed. Such a *curse* acts as a prophetic utterance, unless it is lifted with a *remove curse* spell. For example, an *angreden* might tell a character: "Horses will die under you" and that character would be unable to ride a horse until the curse was lifted. If an *angreden* is given a curse, the XP Value becomes 2,000 instead of 1,400.

The breaking of the burial mound

Gests pattr Bardarsonar (The Saga of Gest Bardson) is more of a fantasy told around a warm fire than a tale based in history. In it, the hero Gest breaks into a barrow mound and confronts the undead king Raknar:

At that time (A.D. 995-1000), King Olaf Tryggvason was ruler of Norway. On Christmas Eve, the king was sitting on his high-seat and the whole court was present, each man in his own seat.

When the men had been drinking for some time, a man walked into the hall. He was tall and evil-looking, with dark skin, flashing eyes, a black beard, and a broad nose. This man wore a helm on his head, a

shirt of ring mail, and a sword at his belt; he had a gold necklace round his neck and a thick gold ring on his arm. He walked up to the king's high seat. People were greatly amazed at this sight. No man greeted the stranger.

This man stood before the king for a while, then said: "I came here thinking that I would at least be offered some hospitality by such great and noble men. I'm going to be more open-handed than that, for I shall offer possession of these fine things I am wearing now to the man who dares come and fetch them from me."

Thereupon, the man went away, and an unpleasant smell spread through the hall. Many men fell unconscious and half-dead. All the watchdogs died, except for the king's dog, *Vigi*, and Gest's dog, *Snati*.

The king said, "Who do you think he can be, Gest, this man who came in here?"

Gest replied, "I've not seen him before, but I've been told by my kinsmen that there was once a king, called Raknar, and I think that I recognize him from their accounts. But that king was buried in Helluland at Raknar'sloda."

Then King Olaf Tryggvason said, "This is my request to you, Gest: that you should fetch those fine treasures."

Gest made ready for his journey. The king gave him 40 iron shoes, all lined with down. He found a Christian priest to go with Gest, a man named Jostein. The priest was highly esteemed by the king, yet Gest had little liking for the man, for Gest still followed the old faith of his ancestors.

The king said, "The priest will give you the finest proof of courage at a time that matters most to you."

"Then he might as well come," said Gest.

The king gave Gest a one-edged sword and said it would bite if there was need. And the king gave Gest a candle and said it would light up of its own accord if it was held up in the air. "For it will be black in Raknar's mound," said King Olaf. "But don't stay there any longer once the candle is burned out—you must take heed of this."

Gest and his men sailed north along the coast all the way past Halogoland and Finnmark as far as Hafnsbota. Then they turned west and sailed until they reached the uninhabited parts of Greenland. By then winter was coming on, so they spent the winter there.

In spring they left there, each man carrying his own provisions. At first they went along the coast, going west-southwest; then they went across country. At first there were glaciers, then great fields of lava. Then they put on the iron shoes that the king had given them. But there were 40 shoes and 21 men, including Gest. No iron shoes had been provided for the priest. Without them the man's feet would be burned open when walking over the lava.

"So now come here, priest," said Gest, "and sit yourself on my pack."

The priest did so. Then Gest walked

ahead and walked most sturdily. They went on for three days, then the lava-field came to an end and they came to the sea. A large island lay off-shore there. A long, thin reef ran out to the island; this was dry at ebb-tide. When the men went out to the island, they saw a huge burial mound.

Gest set his men to work breaking away into the mound by day. By evening they had broken an opening into the mound, but by next morning it had grown together as before. They broke it open again the second day, but by morning it was closed again.

After a third digging, the priest kept watch over the hole. He sat there all night, and he had holy water and a crucifix with him. When time wore on toward midnight, he saw Raknar. Raknar bade the priest come with him, and he would reward the priest with fine gifts.

The priest answered nothing and sat quietly as before. Many extraordinary creatures appeared to him. Some tried to scare the priest, others tried to trick him. Jostein took no notice, no matter what wonders he saw or however savagely these fiends behaved. Toward sunrise, all these wonders vanished away.

The men lowered Gest into the mound. It was a 50-fathom drop to the floor of the mound. Gest had the one-edged sword, the king's gift, belted around his waist. He carried the candle in his hand, and it lit itself as soon as he reached the bottom.

Gest could now see all around the mound. He saw the ship *Slodi* and 500 men in her. Gest then climbed up on the ship and saw that all the men had been on the point of rising to their feet when the candlelight fell on them; none of them could now move. Still, their eyes blinked and their nostrils flared. Gest drew his sword and cut off all their heads, and the blade bit as if it were cutting water.

Then Gest went in search of Raknar. He found an opening going deeper into the ground, and there he saw Raknar sitting on a chair. The undead king was horribly evil to look at. A foul stench was there, and it was cold, too. A chest full of money stood open under Raknar's feet; he had a necklace around his neck, and a thick gold ring on his arm. He wore a coat of mail and had a helm on his head and a sword in his hand.

Gest went up to Raknar and greeted him respectfully, as a king should be greeted, and Raknar bowed his head in answer.

Gest said, "It is true that you are famous. I've come a long way to visit you in your home. You will surely let me have a good reward for my errand, and give me those fine treasures you have. I shall spread the tale of your magnificence far and wide."

Raknar bent his head toward Gest, with the helm on it. Gest took the helm, then stripped Raknar of his coat of mail. Raknar made it all easy for Gest. Gest then took all Raknar's treasures away from him, except the sword. When Gest took hold of this, Raknar sprang to his feet and threw him-

self at Gest. By then the candle, the king's gift, had burned right out.

Then Raknar turned into such a troll that Gest was quite overpowered by him. Gest thought he could see his death for certain. The dead men from the ship also rose to their feet. Gest called upon Bard, his father, who had great power against every type of troll. Bard came, but he accomplished nothing. The dead men kept Bard away from his son.

Then Gest made a vow to Him who had created heaven and earth, that he would accept the Christian faith King Olaf preached if he escaped alive out of the burial mound. Gest also earnestly invoked King Olaf, that the king might aid him. Thereupon Gest saw King Olaf come into the mound with a great light. All the dead men sat back down when bathed in that light. At this sight, Raknar was so troubled that all his strength ebbed out of him. Gest pressed so hard that Raknar fell over backward. Then Gest cut off Raknar's head with the sword the king had given him. The whole task now ended, King Olaf vanished from the mound.

Back atop the mound, while these won-

ders were happening, the men became so upset and frightened that they all ran mad, except for the priest. He never let go of the rope and hauled Gest out of the mound, along with all the treasure. Then the two of them went to where the men struggled with each other. The priest sprinkled holy water over them, and they recovered their wits at once.

As the men made ready to leave, the ground began to shake. The sea rose all along the reef in such crashing breakers the island was nearly flooded. The men could no longer find the reef, so Gest sent his dog Snati out to find it. But the dog could not stand against Raknar's magic and drowned. Gest thought this the greatest loss he had suffered.

Then Jostein the priest went forward, crucifix in hand, sprinkling water upon the waves. The sea divided itself so the men could cross dry-shod to the mainland.

Gest brought all the fine treasures to the king and told King Olaf all that had happened. Gest was then baptized, as he had vowed to do in Raknar's mound.

The following night after Gest had been baptized, he dreamed his father Bard

came to him and said, "You did wrong when you abandoned your faith, which all your forefathers had held. Because of this, you shall lose both your eyes."

Then Bard touched his son's eyes, causing such a severe pain that both eyes burst. At this, Gest died, still wearing his baptismal garments. King Olaf thought this the greatest loss.

King-wight

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any, usually subterranean

FREQUENCY: Very rare

ORGANIZATION: Solitary, but may have followers

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Night

DIET! Carnivore (living beings)

INTELLIGENCE: Exceptional (15)

TREASURE: 50% A

ALIGNMENT: Lawful evil

NO. APPEARING: 1

ARMOR CLASS: -1

MOVEMENT: 12

HIT DICE: 12 +23 (77 hp)

THACO: 4

NO. OF ATTACKS: 3/2 by weapon type or 1 by touch

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1d8 + 5

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Energy drain, wight control, spellcasting, earthquake, magical items

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to some weapons and spells

MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil

SIZE: M (6' - 7')

MORALE: Fearless (20)

XP VALUE: 30,000

A king-wight was once a powerful evil king. When he died, he became undead, continuing to rule the ranks of the walking dead. His death is often voluntary, a self-sacrifice made to gain a prolonged existence.

A king-wight looks like a well-preserved corpse. At nighttime, in artificial light, it can even be mistaken for a living being. It wears its favorite armor and carries its favorite weapons, and is often decorated with expensive jewelry. While a king-wight can appear almost alive, the stench of the grave follows it and gives it away.

Combat: A king-wight fights much the same after death as it did in life. It wears **chain mail +3** and wields a **sword +2** (any type possible). A king-wight was an exceptional human and continues to have excellent attributes even in death. Its attribute statistics are: S 18/50, D 17, C 16, I 15, W 13, Ch 15 (to undead only). These scores and the magical items are already calculated into the king-wight's statistics.

When it becomes undead, a king-wight gains many special abilities. A successful attack can drain two life levels from a victim, as per a vampire. Any victim completely drained of life points by the king-wight becomes a full-strength wight under



the control of the king-wight.

A king-wight also has the ability to cast *spectral force* and confusion spells, one spell per round, without limit. It can *teleport* once per day, but only to or from its barrow home. When the king-wight is destroyed, the action causes an earthquake (as per the clerical spell, at the 14th-level of effect), centered on the king-wight's body, in 4-16 rounds. Since a king-wight is often encountered in its underground barrow, such an earthquake can be especially deadly.

A king-wight is so powerful that any individual of a level lower than the king-wight must make a saving throw vs. spells or flee in panic from *fear*. The following spells or attack forms have no effect on a king-wight: charm, sleep, enfeeblement, *polymorph*, cold, electricity, insanity, and death magic. A *raise dead* spell turns the king-wight into a normal 12th-level fighter unless a saving throw vs. spells is made.

A cleric attempting to turn a king-wight

should use the "special" column. A king-wight can be harmed only by magical weapons.

Habitat/Society: A king-wight retains its court, even after death. It is often surrounded by its faithful warriors, who were turned into wights by the king-wight and remain under their master's control. A king-wight encountered in its barrow usually controls 4-32 normal wights.

A king-wight delights in tricking the living. It often travels to someone's abode to flaunt its treasure and tempt heroes into searching out its lair. A king-wight may appear gracious and hospitable at times, but such appearances are illusory. In reality, the king-wight hates to give up any part of its hoarded treasure and tempts heroes only as a ploy to trap them in its underground barrow, to either slay the heroes by the sword or turn them into wight slaves.

Wraith-king

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any, often subterranean

FREQUENCY: Very rare

ORGANIZATION: Solitary, may have following

ACTIVITY CYCLE: Night

DIET: Carnivore (living beings)

INTELLIGENCE: Genius (17)

TREASURE: 50% H

ALIGNMENT: Lawful evil

NO. APPEARING: 1

ARMOR CLASS: -5

MOVEMENT: 12/36 if riding

HIT DICE: 15 +27 (95 hp)

THACO: -1

NO. OF ATTACKS: 2/1 by weapon type, or 1 by touch

DAMAGE/ATTACK: 1ds + 10

SPECIAL ATTACKS: Energy-drain gaze, wraith control, spellcasting, magical items

SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to some spells and weapons

MAGIC RESISTANCE: 20%

SIZE: M (6'- 7')

MORALE: Champion (15-16)

XP VALUE: 32,000

Wraith-kings were once powerful individuals who so feared death that they made unholy bargains with an evil god. Each individual believed he was gaining immortality, but was instead turned into an undead monster. The body of a wraith-king has faded away completely. Inside the form of its armor, one can see only two hateful red burning eyes.

Combat: A wraith-king fights much as it did in life. It wears *plate armor* +3 and wields a *sword* +4 (any type). It is considered to have exceptional attribute statistics (S 18/00, D 18, C 17, I 17, W 15, Ch 17 (to undead only)). These magical items and attribute scores are already calculated into the wraith-king's statistics.

A wraith-king can drain life levels by gaze alone at the rate of one level per round for any one victim within clear view in a 30' range (the victim must save vs. death ray each round to avoid this effect). Any victim completely drained of life levels becomes a full-strength wraith under the control of the wraith-king.

A wraith-king can cast either a *permanent illusion* or *programmed illusion* once per round, without limit. It can also cast a *mass charm* spell once per day. All spells are cast at the 15th level of ability. A wraith-king is so powerful that any individual of a level lower than the wraith-king must make a saving throw vs. spells or flee in panic from *fear*.

The following spells or attack forms have no effect on a wraith-king: *charm*, *sleep*, *enfeeblement*, *polymorph*, cold, electricity, insanity, and death magic. A wraith-king can be harmed only by magical weapons with at least a +2 bonus, and even these weapons do only half damage.



A wraith-king is even more powerful than a lich. A cleric of level 9-13 has a chance to turn a wraith-king on a roll of 19 or better. A cleric of level 14 + has a chance to turn a wraith-king on a roll of 16 or better. Because a wraith-king's undead power comes directly from a god, a raise dead spell will not affect a wraith-king.

Habitat/Society: A wraith-king lives in an eternal state of anger and hatred. Having been tricked by an evil god, the wraith-king hates the living and seeks, whenever possible, to convert them to undead to increase the wraith-king's following. Even when not guarding its hoarded treasure, a wraith-king seeks out the living to punish them for the anguish it feels. It especially delights in using illusions to trick and tempt the living.

A wraith-king is, however, cautious. It considers itself immortal and, hateful as its undead state is, it nonetheless cherishes its unlife. It will flee if an attack appears to be going against it.

When encountered in its tomb/lair, a wraith-king has control of 4-24 wraiths. When not encountered in its tomb, a wraith-king is likely to be riding a nightmare (see the *Monstrous Compendium*).

Note: Because wraith-kings are so powerful and so rare, it is suggested that a DM use them sparingly. A wraith-king became undead as the act of an evil god, so a good or neutral god often aids a cleric confronting a wraith-king. Such aid may take the form of a special magical item that protects the cleric or the entire party from some of the wraith-king's malign powers. An entire campaign, including visions, communion with a beneficent god or goddess, and the search for an appropriate undead-destroying magical item, can be built around a quest to destroy a single wraith-king.

Vartha

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any
FREQUENCY: Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Any
DIET: Nil
INTELLIGENCE: High (13)
TREASURE: Varies
ALIGNMENT: Any
NO. APPEARING: 1 or 2-12
ARMOR CLASS: 0
MOVEMENT: 12
HIT DICE: 9 +18 (63 hp)
THAC0: 7
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3/2, by weapon type
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 2d4 + 5
SPECIAL ATTACKS: Spellcasting, magical items
SPECIAL DEFENSES: Immunity to some spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE: Nil
SIZE: M (5'-7')
MORALE: Fearless (20)
XP VALUE: 18,000

Vartha means "guardian spirit" It is one of the few undead that are not necessarily malign. A vartha is a guardian spirit in many senses. It can be a spirit conjured or cursed to protect a specific area or treasure. It can also be a spirit that appears to aid a character in times of need. Lastly, it can be a spirit sent to hunt down wrongdoers. A vartha does not share the generally gruesome appearance of the undead. It looks like a newly dead corpse, after the body has been treated by a mortician.

Combat: A vartha has high attribute scores (S 18/75, D 16, C 16, I 13, W 17, Ch 15). It wears *partial plate armor* +2 (AC 2) and wields a *morning star* +2. The magical items and attribute scores have been calculated into the vartha's statistics.

While it is undead, a vartha should otherwise be treated as a fighter-cleric with the following clerical spells, each of which can be cast at the rate of one spell per round, once each per day: *bleed*, *command*, *detect evil*, *light*, *remove fear*; *sanctuary*; *augury*, *detect charm*, *hold person*, *know alignment*, *silence 15' radius*; *animate dead*, *dispel magic*, *locate object*, *remove curse*; *detect lie*,

tongues; *commune*.

A vartha can be of any alignment. One of evil alignment may have the reverse of appropriate spells (e.g., *curse* instead of *bleed*).

A vartha is not affected by *sleep*, *charm*, *hold*, cold, electricity, poison, or death magic. A *raise dead* spell returns it to life as a 9th-level fighter/9th-level cleric. If the vartha serves anyone involuntarily, it need not make a save vs. spells against the *raise dead* spell, and the spell automatically works. The chance for a cleric to turn a vartha is the same as the chance to turn a spectre.

Habitat/Society: Vartha vary in motivation. A vartha guarding its own treasure may have voluntarily become undead through greed. A vartha forced to guard a treasure not its own may be under a curse or commanded by a more powerful being. A vartha sent by the DM to help a character may be that character's guardian spirit, perhaps an ancestor. A vartha hunting down a wrongdoer may have been a marshal in life, continuing its mission after

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The MARVEL®-Phile

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down from the mountain in search of food. While the Glop rampaged through the town, the painter encountered the old man at the castle and demanded an explanation. The old guy admitted that he was a scientist. He discovered the statue and the paints in the castle, along with a parchment that revealed their unearthly origin and the method for reviving the alien beast. The scientist hoped to uncover the Glop's motives before the monster's "comrades" arrived to wake him themselves.

The Glop returned to the keep at that moment, trapping the two humans inside. In a fit of *braggadocio*, the alien boasted that he was an advance scout from a warlike race, sent to Earth to spy on the inhabitants. In time, his fellows would arrive and revive him. Much to his chagrin, though, the humans had already done that and now his mission was ruined. As the Glop prepared to ground the meddling mortals into bone dust, the painter hit upon a desperate plan. He hurled a large can of turpentine at the Glop, which washed away the alien's oozing skin and returned him to his statuelike state once more. There wasn't time for congratulations, though. The villagers, enraged by the monster's attack (and toting torches and pitchforks, as outlined in the *Complete Transylvanian Peasants' Handbook*), stormed the castle and blew it up. The Glop and the unusual paints were buried beneath the shattered keep.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: The Glop is short on subtlety, but long on rage. He will wade into a fight with little provocation, attempting to crush whatever obstacles the despised mortals set in his path. He is prone to throwing large objects, and Judges working him into a scenario should be familiar with the rules for Blunt Throwing attacks detailed in the *MSH Advanced Set's Players' Book*.

Since the castle's destruction in the early 1960s, no one has bothered to sift through the ruins to confirm the Glop's demise. Because the body was never seen, it would be safe to assume he survived somehow and is ready to be unleashed upon the hapless denizens of the MARVEL UNIVERSE once more. Moreover, the Glop's comrades have yet to make their appearance on Earth, so a scenario centering on their arrival would be a natural; explaining why these higher beings left an immobile scout/observer in an isolated Transylvanian castle is optional.

Rewriting history

In his search for foes worthy of battling the Hulk, Xemnu the Living Titan uncovered a conspiracy. The American government, Xemnu claimed, was covering up the multitudinous invasions that plagued the world in the late 1950s and early 1960s, blotting out the names of Diablo, Groot, and the Blip from the history books. I don't know about that, but scholars of the Marvel age of monsters should note that some of the towering titans have undergone subtle changes since their first appearances. For example, in his original outing, the Glop was known as the Glob. And the living alien statue on Easter Island was known as Thor, not Thorg. Apart from the trademark reasons, I suppose the name changes make some continuity sense too. "What's that?" says Spider-Man. "There's a battle in Central Park between Thor and Magneto? Or is that Thor and Magneto? And which Magneto is it, anyway—the guy with the bucket on his head or the old monster?"

The most interesting of these updates has resulted in the birth of a new hero, a guy who is still popping up in comics regularly: Doctor Druid. The origin of this occult master, printed in *Weird Wonder Tales* #19, is actually a slightly redrawn origin story for an old character named Dr. Droom! Then, two issues of *WWT* later, Dr. Druid tells a tale in which he discovers Gorgilla, the Monster of Midnight Mountain, but that, too, is a re-touched story (with Dr. Droom's, er, Druids head replacing that of the tale's true hero, a blond scientist named Scotty). Hmmm.

Maybe Xemnu was right after all. Could Goom and his dreaded son Googam be working through the government to blot out the memories of their monstrous rivals? What about the Living Colossus and Fin Fang Foom? Why have they escaped this revision of history with reputations intact? I'd say it's time for you to mobilize all truth-loving heroes in your campaign so they can restore the real history of the MARVEL UNIVERSE—or at least slug it out with a giant slime beast or two.

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Beyond the Grave

Continued from page 29

death. Vartha do share one personality trait: They are all highly motivated, even driven, whatever their purpose.

Summoning/controlling undead

The summoning and controlling of certain types of very powerful undead, particularly mummies, is a common theme in literature and movies. The DM may wish to allow evil (and some neutral) clerics to summon some kinds of special undead from afar, then control them. The power would require a special ceremony and would depend on the availability of the proper kind of undead. Finally, the cleric would have to maintain concentration to control the undead similar to a mage controlling an elemental.

It is suggested that the cleric gain the power only when his 1d20 roll to turn the appropriate kind of undead becomes less than 10. Some appropriate kinds of undead, and the clerical level at which they could be summoned and controlled, would be: skleros* (8), angreden (5), callicantzari* * (5), skotos* * (6), mummy (8), lesser colossus* * (8), vrykolakas* * * (8), vartha (9), ch'ing shih* * * (9), and ka (14).

* See "Out of the Shadows," in *DRAGON* issue #162.

* * See "The Ungrateful Dead" in *DRAGON* issue #138.

* * * See "Hearts of Darkness" in *DRAGON* issue #126.

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by William Simpson

Lords & Legends

Fabulous riches and hideous death

In the AD&D® module S2 *White Plume Mountain* (later incorporated into S1-4 *Realms of Horror*) is a map showing the environs around that fabled dungeon. Northwest of White Plume Mountain on that map is a passage that reads:

**“BEYOND TO THE LAIR OF DRAGOTHA,
THE UNDEAD DRAGON,
WHERE FABULOUS RICHES AND HIDEOUS DEATH AWAIT.”**

And that was all there was in all of the AD&D game literature about Dragotha — until now.

DRAGOTHA

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
NO. APPEARING: 1
ARMOR CLASS: -3
MOVE: 12"/24" (MC: E)
HIT DICE: 19 (152 hp)
% IN LAIR: 99% (see below)
TREASURE TYPE: H, S, T, U, W × 2 (see below)
NO. OF ATTACKS: 3
DAMAGE/ATTACK: 5-12/5-12/6-36
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Breath weapons; spell use; disease; fear aura; creation of undead followers*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Surprised only on a 1 on 1d12; spell and psionic immunities (see below); immune to electricity; regeneration; takes half damage from edged weapons; cannot be turned by clerics*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: 15%
INTELLIGENCE: *Supra-genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
SIZE: L (48' long)
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defense Modes: *Nil/Immune to all attacks*
CHANCE OF:
Speaking: 100%
Magic use: 100%
Sleeping: *Nil*
LEVEL/XP Value: X/30,560

Originally from the first plane of the Nine Hells, Dragotha was in life a huge, ancient, red dragon — a consort of the evil dragon queen Tiamat. Being the most powerful of Tiamat's companions, he enjoyed privileges that no other dragon could hope for. However, like all who are in league with Tiamat, he was expendable. When Dragotha murdered another dragon who threatened his position with Tiamat, the dragon queen became furious and ordered Dragotha's death. Ready to obey her will (as well as eliminate a rival), the other dragons killed Dragotha. Dragotha, however, had made plans before his death to insure that he lived forever. He had contacted an unknown deity of death who, for personal reasons, agreed to restore "life" to Dragotha's body when Dragotha died. The deity restored Dragotha, but instead of renewed life, Dragotha was placed in an eternal cursed state resembling lichdom. Dragotha was allowed to escape to the Prime Material Plane, where the deity was sure Dragotha's rage would cause massive death and destruction — which would please this evil deity, who is rumored to have been Nerull the Reaper (described in the *WORLD OF GREYHAWK™* fantasy setting booklets).

Dragotha now lives in his lair on Oerth, in the northern part of the Flanaess.

Though mention of his lair on the map in *White Plume Mountain* makes it appear that he is located near that volcano-fortress (hex T3-70 on the maps that come with the *WORLD OF GREYHAWK* fantasy setting boxed set), Dragotha's lair is actually in hex K4-58, on the edge of the Cold Marshes just north of the Howling Hills. He ventures out once every century or so to spend his fury on whomever he can find. The rest of his days are spent preparing for the day when he can challenge both Tiamat and the deity responsible for his curse. He does not venture out often, for he does not wish to draw unwanted attention. His influence across Oerth is thus small, though his ultimate plans are of mighty and merciless revenge. His lair is said to extend endlessly into the earth, and is filled with treasure and riches — but it is also said that Dragotha chooses only magical items that he can use himself, and he uses them freely if need be.

Dragotha appears to be a huge, skeletal dragon, with wings covered by a thin, clear membrane that allows flight when he flaps his wings. His eyes glow with a pale blue light, and his movements are intelligent and carefully considered most of the time. If enraged for some reason, Dragotha loses all self-control and lashes out savagely at all living beings nearby. It is said that his voice is always that of a soft, lispng whisper. Dragotha knows most of the languages of the Flanaess, and collects trivial bits of information from captives (apparently for his own curiosity) before slaying them.

While a red dragon, Dragotha was considered one of Tiamat's best fighters. He is still very capable. Dragotha attacks with his two powerful claws and his vicious bite. Any hit made by Dragotha not only does normal damage but also casts *cause disease* on living beings (a saving throw vs. spells negates this effect). Although his claws and bite are powerful, they are nothing compared to his powerful breath weapons. Because of his curse, Dragotha can use three different breath weapons, including a cone of frost similar to that of a white dragon, and a poisonous chlorine gas cloud similar to that of a green dragon. The cone of frost is 90' long with a base diameter of 30'; the gas cloud is 60' long, 40' wide, and 30' high. Each breath weapon does 152 hp damage if the victim fails his saving throw vs. breath weapon; the victim takes half damage if he makes his saving throw. Dragotha can use each of these two breath attacks two times daily.

However, sometimes Dragotha wishes to use his opponents to serve his needs. In this case, he uses his most powerful breath weapon: his dreaded *death wind*. This wind of negative energy causes all beings within range to save vs. breath weapon or die; slain humans, demihumans, humanoids, and giantkind are then transformed into undead warriors who serve their slayer. Those who save take no physical damage, but have a -4

penalty applied to all saving throws, attacks, and ability scores (to a minimum score of 1) for 2-12 turns. Such survivors are weak from having their life force almost drained, and a second saving throw vs. spells (with wisdom bonuses applicable) must be made or else the victims are filled with *fear*, causing them to flee in terror and be unable to return to face Dragotha for 4-24 hours. This breath weapon may be used twice per day, resembles a blast of rippling black energy, and has the same dimensions as the cone of frost weapon.

A person changed by Dragotha into an undead warrior (known in legend as a *drakanman*) retains all hit dice, hit points, and strength scores, but loses all other learned skills and bonuses as well as psionic and spell-casting abilities. Each drakanman (unless magical items or armor dictate otherwise) has a base AC 7, with a bonus of -1 per level of the victim over 1st level to a limit of AC 0. (To determine the level of multiclassed characters, average the levels and round up.) Beings with less than 1 HD or of zero level simply become 1 HD drakanmen. Drakanmen (like Dragotha himself) are immune to all enchantment/charm and illusion/phantasm spells, all forms of *fear* and paralysis, poison, insanity, death-related spells, sunlight, psionic attacks, and all cold-based spells and effects. They strongly resemble zombies but gain normal reaction in

melee. Holy water does 2-8 hp damage per vial to them. Drakanmen are semi-intelligent, but they follow only Dragotha's orders, which are given in a coded language that only Dragotha speaks. They can use armor, shields, weapons, and simple magical devices — often the very ones that they used in life when they came to attack Dragotha. A *resurrection* spell can reverse this condition, if cast within seven days of the drakanman's creation; after that, only a *wish* will work (affecting only one drakanman per *wish*).

A drakanman is usually useful for 10-40 years, after which time it collapses and disintegrates; the victim cannot then be returned to life by any means. All drakanmen have a movement rate of 15". If unarmed, they strike once per round with a fist, doing 1-4 hp damage, plus any strength bonuses possessed in life.

Dragotha can control as many hit dice of warriors as he has hit points (152). Because of his powerful nature, Dragotha is aware of how close to this limit his combined force of drakanmen is, and he knows the relative power of individual drakanmen. Dragotha's control over his drakanmen allows him to select one of his individual drakanmen and see whatever that drakanman sees, though this activity cannot be performed while doing anything else. Switching to another drakanman's viewpoint takes one round. Dragotha can

still receive brief mental warnings from any one of his drakanmen at any time, if such were placed on guard duty and ordered to notify Dragotha if intruders appear. In such an event, Dragotha would receive the warning but would have to look through the drakanman's eyes to see what the problem was, as no other information but the "paging call" could be sent. The range of this mental effect is one mile. One of Dragotha's favorite tricks is to place his drakanmen in positions whereby they not only frighten away potential looters but also serve as spies.

Excess drakanmen not controlled by Dragotha (but produced by him) are given one last command by Dragotha and sent away; the command is limited to a few words, typically "Go back from whence ye came and kill all that ye see." The demigod Iuz, who rules the land south of Dragotha's lair, was rumored to have sent a hundred goblins to test his neighbor. Dragotha sent them back as 1-HD drakanmen that caused Iuz much regret.

In addition to his terrible breath weapons, Dragotha can also cast spells at the power of a 14th-level magic-user. He can cast seven first-level spells, six second, five third, four fourth, three fifth, two sixth, and one seventh. He can choose from any magic-user spells but must memorize them as any other magic-user. It is believed he already knows the spell *write* and has the permanent power to *read magic* and see *invisible objects*.

If wounded, Dragotha *regenerates* damage at the rate of 1 hp per turn. The mere sight of this monster causes all creatures within 120 yards and under 5 hit dice or levels to flee in panic. More powerful beings are allowed a saving throw vs. spells, though those with 8 hit dice or levels are immune to this effect. Living dragons who meet Dragotha immediately flee without bothering to attack, as they have heard of him and are terrified to be in the same area with him.

Dragotha has few weaknesses. Attackers may hit him with nonmagical weapons, and *holy swords* do double damage to him (edged weapons, however, do only half damage to his skeletal form). Like all undead, he is affected by holy water, which does 4-10 (2d4 + 2) hp damage to him. Dragotha, although formerly a red dragon, is now vulnerable to fire due to his undead status, taking +1 per hit dice of damage.

Because Dragotha has many guards (20-80 levels worth at any one time) and because of his innate ability to see invisible creatures (even through the eyes of a drakanman), he is rarely surprised. All of his mazelike caverns are closely watched and trapped due to his desire for privacy. If caught in a no-escape situation, Dragotha attempts to bargain his way out. This does not mean that he will serve an earthly master, however, for he has vowed to never again be placed in the role of a servant.



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WYRMS of the NORTH™

FORGOTTEN REALMS

SETTING



by Ed Greenwood

illustrated by Storn Cook

“The Creeping Doom”

The prying of Volo (polished somewhat by Elminster, whose eyebrows rose on more than one occasion while reading them) bring us this time to something the Old Mage had intended to omit from this survey of powerful dragons of the North: a dracolich. So you’re now reading something even Elminster decided to leave out of a book!

Why would one of the most powerful wizards in all Toril break his own rules now? Well, this undead wyrm bears watching. Not only is his influence quickly spreading, but the dracolich Daurgothoth is attempting to gain some abilities of other dragon types (he was originally a black wyrm) and to “come back to life” sufficiently to breed true and found his own new dragon species.

The twin obsessions of achieving personal supremacy and fathering a new race have kept Daurgothoth busy for over a century, improving his abilities however he can, and seeking a suitable mate — or planning how to construct one, much as he’s been modified in undeath.

The implications of Daurgothoth’s fascinating endeavor are dark indeed. The only reason hordes of adventurers haven’t descended on the dracolich, seeking his destruction, is that they don’t know about him. Plenty of wild rumors are, however, spreading....

Both Tolgar Anuvien and Malchor Harpell are (independently) beginning to uncover the location and activities of the undead wyrm, but the only folk who know the broad truth about the nature and aims of Daurgothoth are the Chosen of Mystra, powerful figures such as Elminster, Khelben, Laeral, and Alustriel. These archmages will not act or speak out against him, because the magical experimentation and advances Daurgothoth is making are precisely the sort of thing Divine Mystra encourages, so that magic will continue to grow.

Daurgothoth is under no such restrictions and energetically seeks to slaughter any being who learns of his endeavors or who stumbles upon his lair. He has already slain no fewer than three bands

of hired adventurers who were working for him in Waterdeep — but whom he judged had begun to suspect too much about him. His spells allow him to speak with such underlings by means of projected (human-seeming) images and to spy upon them from afar. When doing so, Daurgothoth customarily poses as some sort of renegade, deliberately mysterious mage.

In such roles, this dracolich has begun to play an increasingly active role in the shadier businesses of the cities of Waterdeep, Baldur’s Gate, Neverwinter, and Secomber. At first, he pursued the acquisition of spells, magical items, and substances that might serve as magical components, but this drew the attention of too many alarmed mages and authorities (one of whom dubbed the unknown cause of the thefts “the Creeping Doom,” a title Daurgothoth gleefully adopted), so he’s taken to cloaking his activities behind a web of often unwitting thieving bands and sharp-dealing gray market merchants.

Once a great wyrm of considerable size, with a distinctive gouge in his left flank (an old, nearly mortal wound), Daurgothoth was transformed into a dracolich by the crazed Cult mage Huulukharn. He promptly slew the wizard and vanished from the knowledge and influence of the Cult.

Today, the Creeping Doom possesses all of the normal powers of a dracolich and a great black wyrm, plus a tail sting that lashes out once per round for up to 36' at his normal THAC0 of 1 to slash for 2d6+12 hp damage, or to stab for 4d4+12 hp damage. As his breath weapon, Daurgothoth can choose to employ (once in every three rounds) any one of the following effects:

- ❖ The original breath weapon of his black dragon form: a stream of acid 5' wide and 60' long in a straight line, dealing 4d4+12 hp damage.

- ❖ A bolt of lightning akin to that of a blue dragon, but slightly less potent: this 5' wide breath attack extends 70' and deals only 4d8+6 hp damage.

- ❖ A cone of fire 60' long, flaring from 5' wide to 30' and dealing 7d10+7 hp damage.

- ❖ A cone of frost 60' long, flaring from 5' wide to 30' and dealing 8d6+8 hp damage.

- ❖ A bone spray (cone of whirling bone shards) 60' long, flaring from 5' wide to 20' and dealing 12d4 hp piercing and slashing damage. If Daurgothoth so chooses, this attack can cause only half damage, but the bones then gather together to form skeletons, rising 6 rounds later as 1d4+4 undead human skeletons under the absolute control of the dracolich. If a "1" is rolled for the number of skeletons, that one skeleton is a giant skeleton (see "Skeleton, Giant" in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome).

- ❖ An "undeath gout" that takes effect in a cone 40' long, flaring from 5' wide to 20' and affecting only dead creatures in this area, animating them as zombies that rise in 1d3 rounds or skeletons that rise in 1d2 rounds, in either case under Daurgothoth's absolute command. Note that this breath weapon can transform partial skeletal remains (of any body parts) into crawling claws and make snakes or flying creatures of any sort into deathfangs (detailed in the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set, on the "Flying Fang" monster sheet). Living creatures touched by an undeath gout are chilled for 1d10 hp damage (no saving throw).

- ❖ A "banish undeath" breath weapon effect that forms a cone 40' long, flaring

from 5' wide to 20' and remaining effective for 1 round. All undead coming into contact with any part of it are affected as follows:

- ❖ Undead of 5 hit dice or fewer (such as ghouls, wights, shadows, ghouls, zombies, and skeletons) are instantly rendered into inanimate dead. Depending on their natures, this destroys them or leaves them as remains that could be raised to life or made into undead again by subsequent magics (note that Daurgothoth can readily cause hostile lesser undead to fall and then rise again — by use of his undeath gout — as undead under his command).

- ❖ Undead of 6-8 HD (wraiths, mummies, and spectres) are allowed a saving throw vs. breath weapon to escape the instant termination of their undeath.

- ❖ More powerful undead can't be stripped of their undeath by this breath weapon. They do, however (along with lesser undead) suffer 4d4 hp damage from contact with a banish undeath breath effect.

Daurgothoth is known to be developing other breath weapon attacks — in particular seeking to modify certain of his spells into this attack form. The full range and power of his spells far outstrip those of normal dracoliches or dragons of any sort, and they seem to be on a par with those of an archmage of 25th level. Rather than the normal spell roster for a black dragon, and the "once per day" nature of dracolich magic, Daurgothoth now wields a roster of five memorized spells of each level that individually return to him 24 hours after being cast. To change a memorized spell, Daurgothoth must undertake study as a human mage does. He casts spells and makes saving throws as a 25th level wizard, retaining the 45% magic resistance he had as a living great black wyrm.

He is also known to have modified his undead body to achieve immunity to the following spells: imprisonment; power word, kill; reverse gravity; sink; temporal stasis; and time stop.

Daurgothoth's host (see "Dracolich" in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome for the function of a dracolich's host) is rumored to be a black opal of insignificant size, hidden in a huge heap of gems of all types and sizes that nearly fills a cavern that also holds the skeletal bodies of six lesser dragons that could serve him as a succession of replacement bodies. This cave is walled away behind tumbled rock somewhere under the gem-filled

cavern of Daurgothoth's main lair. (The rock to be dug aside to reach it may well underlie the dracolich's bonepile itself.)

Daurgothoth is a brilliant crafter of magic, an eternally inquisitive being, and a practiced observer with an impressive memory. He is governed by a wary paranoia that keeps him always on the lookout for lurking foes and possible attacks, and that makes him work constantly to better his personal powers and defenses. This is one wyrm who will never be found with most or all of his spells exhausted. If he ever reaches such a state (in the heat of protracted battle), he swiftly departs, to hide away until his magic is again strong. He is patient in his dealings and calm in battle; none can successfully goad him, and pride never leads him into overconfidence in battle, or any stubborn refusal to retreat. For an immortal dracolich who takes care to safeguard himself from destruction, there will always be another day for fighting — or for seeking revenge.

Daurgothoth is known to have a cruel sense of humor and to enjoy anticipating tactics ahead in any struggle. He craves music and company from time to time, but he never lets these needs compromise the security of his lair. Beautiful lady bards who acquire mysterious lone male human audiences at their campfires in the North are warned that they could be entertaining simple travelers, lycanthropes or dopplegangers, Harpers — or the Creeping Doom. Daurgothoth seldom molests or devours good singers.

Daurgothoth's lair

The Creeping Doom lairs in the abandoned gnome city of Dolblunde north and east of Waterdeep. Known entrances to this subterranean labyrinth include the "Bandit Tunnels" in nearby Maiden's Tomb Tor, certain passages in the vast dungeon complex of Undermountain, and a flooded tunnel leading from the muddy bottom of the River Dessarin itself. This latter, largest route is the one most often used by Daurgothoth, though the dracolich does employ *teleport* spells on occasion.

Daurgothoth's spells have hollowed out many large caverns for his convenience, forming an ever-growing chain that is tunneling slowly northwest, to a planned emergence shaft in the mountains north of Waterdeep.

To discourage intruders, the undead wyrm has placed many traps in the smaller gnomish passages surrounding the great caverns of his lair. There are a

few teeter-block pitfalls, but most of these perils are stone spikefall traps (sharpened stones on dangle-chains, that typically fall for 5d4 hp damage).

These mechanical hazards are assisted by unswervingly loyal undead servitors: deathfangs and a new sort of monster created by the Creeping Doom — bone lurkers.

These undead creatures appear as portcullises or gridwork-curtains of interlaced human and beast bones. They function just as living lurkers, except that their initial attack is a piercer-like fall from above to thrust into foes for 4d6 hp damage.

Bone lurkers have a Morale of 20 and share all the usual spell immunities of undead (suffering only half damage from edged weapons, as skeletons). After its first plummeting attack, a bone lurker tries to wrap itself around foes, as do living lurkers, dealing entangled opponents 3d4 hp piercing damage per round. It moves by flying (as a lurker) and fights foes it hasn't enfolded by slapping them once per round for 1d6 hp damage. Bone lurkers never retreat from foes except by Daurgothoth's command. A bone lurker has an XP Value of 4,000 — but some have been encountered that unleash one of the Creeping Doom's spells upon foes with such effects as paralyzation, weakness, magical fear, or blindness; these are thought to be magics cast into the lurkers and somehow held for passing on to living targets. These spell-holding bone lurkers are worth 5,000 XP.

Certain passages in Daurgothoth's lair also boast what can only be the wyrm's salvaged early attempts at creating a tail-sting: great snakelike assemblies of bone that are fixed to the wall, ceiling, or floor at one end, but they can coil and lash out from that anchor point, to slash or stab foes with a bone "sword-spike" as long as some men stand tall. This fearsome edged weapon pierces for 3d8 hp damage or slashes for 2d6 hp damage.

These bony "stings" range in length from 70' to 30' (although they can retract into a compact stack as short as 20'). Although they are unintelligent constructs (unaffected by spells designed to control the mind or deceive the senses), they seem able to sense all living beings within their reaches. They attack all such targets, and each has 4 to 8 HD and an AC of 7. A sting has one stab and one slash attack in a round, at the THACO appropriate for its hit dice,

and it is subject to spells that control undead or that influence bones. If one is severed from its base or separated into its component parts, all of their animation is lost; shards from shattered "sting bones have no properties beyond that of any other (dead, not undead) bony material.

At the heart of Daurgothoth's chain of caverns is a side passage large enough for a dragon to fly down. It is guarded by a wall of monster skeletons (the remains of a tribe of mountain giants, still armed with their clubs) who have orders to attack all beings in the tunnel who aren't Daurgothoth himself. Above them hangs a death tyrant (undead beholder, its precious surviving eyestalk powers unknown) with similar orders.

Beyond these guardians, the tunnel leads to a closed stone door that is itself a stone golem that attacks anyone trying to open it and reflects all spells used against it 100% back at their source. The door opens into a vast, ravaged cavern almost half a mile in length, its walls scorched and scarred, and its floor heaped with broken stone. This is the dracolich's spellcasting chamber, where he experiments with magics.

A smaller tunnel leads off of one side of this cave, doubling back on itself several times, to reach the gem-filled cave where Daurgothoth sleeps and broods upon a huge pile of bones. Aside from the rumored secret, walled-away chamber that holds his host, two lesser caverns are known to branch away from the main one: a treasure vault crammed with all manner of magic, statuettes, coins, and the like; and a storage room where the dragon keeps his spellbooks, the magical items he knows enough about to feel safe in using (just what these are remains a mystery), and a smooth-walled prison pit into which he drops living creatures he wants to keep for later. This pit is a smooth-walled (the stone walls fused into an almost glassy state by many applications of fiery breath and certain spells) shaft 30' across and 100' deep. The pit floor is damp sand, and lost in it is a *staff of the magi* (unknown to Daurgothoth). The dragon typically loops a rope around prisoners and tosses them down the shaft, securing the upper end of their pull-rope under a "lid" consisting of a huge, four-ton slab of stone that covers the top of the shaft. Dangerous prisoners (such as spellcasting adventurers) are encased in a set of *iron bands of Bilarro*

first; this sphere lies ready in a hollow beside the shaft. Much of the rest of this storage cavern is filled with a vast collection of odd substances that might serve as material components, including the pickled corpses of such large monsters as dragon turtles, purple worms, and remorhaz (and, of course, several sorts of dragons).

In his main lair, Daurgothoth's massive bonepile affords him raw material for his bone-related attacks. He has the ability to teleport all non-enchanted, non-undead bare bones within 40' into himself (they fly at MV 7, MC: D and cause no harm upon entering his skeletal form), to breathe forth as necessary. If away from his bonepile, he can transport bones from it over any distance on Toril to his innards.

Daurgothoth's domain

From Dolblunde, Daurgothoth keeps watch over traffic on the High Road, the Long Road and on the River Dessarin, as well as overland from the walls of Goldenfields south along the west bank of the Dessarin to Zundbridge, and north from there along the coast roughly as far as Mount Sar. He lacks the time to spy much in Waterdeep but employs a modified, long-range wizard eye spell for hours at a time to peer at things in the City of Splendors when he's interested in something (when word is abroad in the city about a wizardly duel, for instance, or the Watchful Order is gathering to discuss something important). Daurgothoth is interested in all things magical and in news of dragons and their doings. He's not, however, interested in being identified and located by nosy priests or mages, and he seldom acts openly in his "territory."

One day, when his lair reaches to the surface somewhere in the mountains, he may fly forth each night to destroy any who dare to question his authority — once his traps are ready to deal with the archmages who will inevitably try to destroy him. Soon, perhaps...

In the meantime, Daurgothoth prefers to employ various unscrupulous minor mages (including, notably, several Zhentarim magelings who fled the fall of Zhentil Keep) and adventuring bands. He keeps these forces believing they're working for a Waterdhavian noble who uses magic to conceal his identity and tries to keep each group of his agents ignorant of the existence of the others. Sometimes he tests their loyalty and mettle by sending various agents after the

same thing, to see who prevails, how, and what they report to him about it.

These agents serve to seize various magical items, spells, and substances that could serve in spellcasting. Daurgothoth often employs such aliases as “the Masked Master” or “Onalibar” when dealing with his underlings (the latter name is a private joke: it once belonged to a Cult mage who tried to enslave the dracolich soon after his initial rebellion — and who was promptly eaten for his pains). He rewards the mages with useful spells from his collection, steering them into stealing or developing other magics for him in return.

The deeds of Daurgothoth

Freed of the need to hunt or consume any sort of food, Daurgothoth can pursue ever-greater magical achievements more or less constantly.

Daurgothoth tries to hide from other dracoliches and living dragons as much as possible, as well as from the annoyingly energetic members of the Cult of the Dragon. He has decided that if the latter organization proves to be too much of an annoyance, he will attempt to take over its leadership (concealing his true nature) and put it to work for him, in his quest for the finding or making of a perfect mate.

Daurgothoth is especially wary of, and yet fascinated by, amethyst dragons and faerie dragons. He judges that their skills make them unpredictable and therefore dangerous, yet he also considers them possible sources for something that could be bred or modified into his mate. He is also interested in fire lizards and fire drakes as possible “raw material” breeding stock, so he follows news of their movements. Studying the activities of the Cult of the Dragon and of mages in general (while keeping well away from strongly organized groupings of mages such as the Red Wizards of Thay or the archwizards of Halruaa) makes up much of his daily work. He’s always considering schemes to improve the powers of any underlings or constructed servitor creatures to “snatch” newly developed magics from such sources undetected — or at least in such a way that they can’t reliably be followed. Often he ponders how he might mind-control a scholar of Candlekeep well enough to learn things mind-to-mind and direct what books the individual read, while at the same time eluding the efforts of anyone searching for such a mind-link (which those in

power in Candlekeep do regularly, as such infiltrations have been attempted so often in the recent past).

Daurgothoth’s current activities include trying to infiltrate temples of Lathander to gain magic related to the creation of life (for his own breeding plans) and personally trying to develop a breath weapon that will act as a *Mordenkainen’s disjunction* on everyone’s magic but his. (Thus far, he can breathe out a *dispel magic* conical effect, but he resists using it in battle, because it tends to spin wild magic away from its verges, sometimes doing him more harm than good.)

Daurgothoth’s magic

The Creeping Doom commands almost as wide an array of personally-modified spells as do the Seven Sisters, or such mighty mages as Elminster and Khelben Arunsun. This magazine could be filled several times over with them, but one deadly magic deserves mention because it is so spectacular:

Bonemelt

(Necromancy)

Level: 8

Range: 10 yds. + 10 yds./level

Components: V

Duration: 1 day/level

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Special

This spell transforms the bones of a living mammalian creature to jelly, causing the victim to collapse (at the end of the next round) into a helpless, amoeba-like slithering blob. Breathing and movement (by creeping, at MV 4) is possible, but climbing, flying, wielding items, and the like becomes impossible. Death won’t directly occur from this alteration but it often results from the lack of swift mobility the spell causes. Daurgothoth can reverse the effect at will (usually so that the victim can be slain and then made into a servitor undead), but it otherwise lasts for 25 days when he casts it.

“Boneless” creatures do not need to eat, sleep, drink, or breathe, but they suffer 4d4 hp damage per day if subjected to full sunlight for more than seven continuous hours. A full day after the spell affects them (24 hours, or 144 turns), they are allowed a Constitution check. If the save succeeds, the victim changes in 1 turn to the same state as if he had saved against the spell originally (see below).

If a target of this spell successfully saves against the *bonemelt* attack, only one limb is affected (determine randomly between arms and legs; heads and tails — if any — are not targeted by the magic). It turns to a dangling, jelly-like mass lacking the strength to hold or carry things. If the limb is used for locomotion, the creature’s movement rate drops by three-quarters (round up), and spellcasting or activities requiring careful balance or deft manipulations typically become impossible. Worn or held items may or may not be dropped, depending on the situation and the actions of the victim.

Daurgothoth’s fate

The Creeping Doom is so ambitious that his schemes seem destined to failure. Even Daurgothoth himself is aware that spawning a race of descendants having powers akin to his own could well be bringing on his own eventual doom (at their hands). Still, even if he never mates, his continual growth in power is a matter of grave concern for folk all over Faerûn, both draconic and human.

This dracolich will stop at nothing, and Mystra seems content to let him build himself into the greatest creature of magic in all Toril if he can achieve this aim. At the same time, his lonely search for a mate opens him to attack from wily foes, and if his seizures of magic grow more successful, he’ll soon have no shortage of those.



Ed Greenwood is an overweight, bespectacled, hirsute rogue who loves crawling through caves and swinging swords at imaginary foes. What he did to the armorer at the local museum last year was purely a misunderstanding.



LYCANTHROPY

There have been many different approaches to the disease of lycanthropy. Many are too complicated to understand or are structured so poorly that the wererecreation dominates the game. Lycanthropy as a form of player character should be discouraged in **AD&D**. This can be done by promoting the human attributes instead of the beast's, thus making lycanthropy undesirable (as it should be).

Some players may not realize that any damage of over 50% of hit points sustained by bites in a fight with a lycanthrope may cause them to be afflicted by the disease. When this happens it may be months after the first night of the change before the character begins to suspect that lycanthropy has taken hold of his or her being. After that first night all that will be remembered is that the character was very ill and extremely tired. In the morning the townspeople will quite possibly be combing the countryside looking for a rampaging lycanthrope. The player character may join in the search for the werebeast, not realizing that he or she is the lycanthrope. After a few months of changing, the adventurer will (or should) begin to suspect that something is wrong. On the nights before the full moon the lycanthrope will become withdrawn and a bit edgy, preferring his or her own company to that of others — including family. It may be the torn and shredded clothes he or she wakes up in or the mud and scratches on the character's arms and legs that trigger the realization that he or she may be the werebeast the townspeople are searching for. If at all possible, the DM should try to moderate the campaign so that the players don't know for several months of game time that the character is now a lycanthrope.

Any human player character (humans are the only beings able to contract lycanthropy) bitten for 50% or more of his or her natural hit points has a 100% chance of becoming a lycanthrope of the same type that attacked him or her. If the player eats any belladonna within an hour after being bitten, there is a 25% chance the disease will not manifest itself, and thus the character will not be afflicted by it. If not, then a 12th or higher level patriarch must be found to administer a *cure disease* within three days after being bitten. If the adventurer is only able to find a patriarch of a high enough level after the initial three days, he or she may elect instead to have the priest attempt a *remove curse*. This spell must be performed on the player character when he or she is in wereform. The beast will need to make a monster's saving throw against magic, and while in wereform the creature will fight violently to put as much distance as it can between it and the patriarch performing the spell. If all this fails, there is still hope . . .

At this point, if the player wishes to remain a lycanthrope the two charts given later should be consulted in handling the lycanthrope as a player character. If the adventurer decides to be cured and the methods mentioned thus far have been unsuccessful, he or she may take refuge in a holy/unholy place such as a monastery or an abbey. There the clerics can administer to the afflicted one holy/unholy water laced with a goodly amount of wolfsbane and belladonna prepared by the spiritual methods of that particular religion. This potion is to be consumed by the victim at least twice a day from a silver chalice. No adventuring may be done by the character while he or she is being treated by the clerics. After a month or more (depending upon how advanced the disease is) the player character should be cured and somewhat poorer in the purse, as this procedure is very costly. The clerics will charge for the cost of the herbs and the holy/unholy water as well as for the services rendered. The DM may also wish to include the level of the priest as well as the adventurer into the cost of this treatment.

If the character has died in a fight with a lycanthrope and is resurrected, the disease will be 100% certain if the cleric raising the adventurer is unaware of the disease or fails to follow the proper procedure to eradicate it. The aforementioned cure will work on the werestricken adventurer who has been resurrected. The cleric can use a *cure disease* (if there is still time) or a *remove curse* (if there isn't) on the dead adventurer before employing the *resurrection* spell. If the cleric doesn't take the above safety measures, then it will be necessary to wait until the adventurer becomes a lycanthrope to try to *remove curse* or use the cure with the herbs and holy/unholy water.

If the character opts to remain a lycanthrope, many things will need to be taken into consideration, such as the mental anguish caused by the act of changing. Other things, like conflicting alignments between the character and his or her lycanthrope nature, and what his or her family and friends will do once they discover that their friend and loved one is the werebeast that might have been terrorizing the countryside on the nights of the full moon, will have to be

determined. The more extreme the difference in the alignments of the adventurer and the beast, the more mental anguish the character will be prone to suffer. For example, a lawful good paladin is bitten by a werewolf, which is a chaotic evil creature. He doesn't discover that he has the disease until it is too late. His mental torment is great, especially when the moon is waxing full, up to the time it is full and then for several days afterwards. (The DM may wish to select a mental disorder from the section on **INSANITY** for the character to suffer from to reflect the effects of the anguish caused by the disease). The paladin, even after being cured, is no longer a paladin because he is no longer pure enough for that honored state. The DM can elect to have the gods send the paladin on a quest in order to restore him to his paladinhood, but it is *not* recommended.

No experience points may be gained by a player character while in lycanthrope form. If the character is a fighter/lycanthrope, the fighter will be able to gain levels only as a fighter, never as a lycanthrope. This applies to all classes. The only way a lycanthrope will ever be able to control the change from man to beast is with time measured by full moons. There will be no control of the change into a werebeast for two years of game time and it will be another year before any control will be gained for the change back into a human. On the nights of a full moon all lycanthropes with less than three years experience as a werebeast will change into their wereform and remain that way from the rise of the moon till dawn.

There are other factors besides the full moon that can cause the release of the wererecreation in a person afflicted with lycanthropy. One common cause is stress during a melee. If the character has lost more than one-third of his or her natural hit points during the fight, there is a 50% chance that the wererecreation will emerge, causing the player character to be disoriented for 1 to 2 rounds (characters with more than two years of experience as a lycanthrope will not suffer this disorientation). During this time, the lycanthrope will be unable to engage in combat. He or she will also sustain damage from the change as shown on the appropriate table given below. Spells used in the vicinity of a lycanthrope such as *monster summoning III-VII*, *conjure animals*, and *animal summoning III* might cause the wererecreation to be released. It will be up to the DM to decide what spells or magic items could trigger the beast inside the afflicted adventurer. Arguments with other player characters as well as fear could cause the change from man to beast.

All lycanthropes will fight and do damage as described in the **MONSTER MANUAL** regardless of how long the character has been a lycanthrope. The diseased adventurer will eventually acquire the alignment of the lycanthrope form (if it isn't the same already) within 2 to 12 months.

While in wereform the character will not be interested in any of his or her belongings and will leave them where the change took place. This includes armor and weapons (except for wererats, who will carry swords).

Werebears are the most powerful form of lycanthrope. As with most lycanthropes, they will eventually flee to the woods. Once a werebear engages in combat with a creature of an evil alignment it will fight until it or its opponent is dead. Seventy-five percent of the time, if a monster with an evil alignment is encountered, the werebear will attack immediately.

Wereboars are the most foul-tempered of the lycanthropes. Their temperament is such that they will not join a party unless they can be the leader. If they do join one and are not its leader, they will argue bitterly with anyone who disagrees with them. This action may cause them to change into their wereform from the stress involved in the argument.

Wererats will want to live in the city near humans (humans being one of their favorite foods). If a human is captured and not eaten immediately, it will probably be held for ransom. A wererat will do all it can to keep the party it is with from discovering that it is a lycanthrope. Wererats are the only lycanthropes that will carry a sword or use any kind of a weapon while in animal form. When the marching order of a party is being decided, a wererat will almost always volunteer to be in the rear.

Weretigers are usually interested only in what benefits them. They will tolerate other cats to a certain extent and perhaps even have one for a companion. In human form weretigers can be mistaken for magic-users if they have a domestic cat for an apparent familiar. For this reason many in **AD&D** will disguise themselves as a magic-user, possibly taking up the trade just enough to give the facade an appearance of realism. Weretigers might have no qualms about turning on their party if the party begins to behave in a manner that the weretiger finds incompatible with its desires.

Werewolves are chaotic evil and therefore very unpredictable, especially in a melee. Werewolves tend to run in packs or family units. Seldom will they join a normal party of adventurers, and if they do, once discovered as a lycanthrope they will turn and attack the party, usually choosing to do so when the adventurers are in combat with another monster.

Change Table For Lycanthropes:

This table will aid the DM in determining the percentage chances of a player character lycanthrope changing into and out of wereform. After six years of experience, lycanthropes will be able to control their change at will.

	1-2 years	3	4	5
WANING MOON				
Full	100%*	75%**	50%	25%
Half	75%**	25%	15%	5%
Quarter	50%	5%	—	—
New Moon	25%**	—	—	—
WAXING MOON				
Quarter	50%	—	—	—
Half	75%**	30%	20%	10%
Full	100%*	80%	55%	30%

* There is no chance for voluntarily changing out of wereform.
 ** There is only a 25% chance for voluntarily changing out of wereform.

Damage Table:

This table shows how much damage a character takes from armor constriction (before the straps burst and it falls off) during sudden change to lycanthrope form.

Armor Type	Were-bear	Were-boar	Were-rat	Were-tiger	Were-wolf
No Armor	0	0	0	0	0
Leather/Padded	1	1	0	1-2	1
Studded Leather/ Ring Mail	1-2	1-2	1	1-3	1-2
Scale Mail	1-3	1-3	1-2	1-4	1-3
Chain Mail	1-4	1-4	1-2	2-4	1-4
Splint Mail/ Banded Mail	2-4	2-4	1-2	2-5	2-4
Plate Mail	2-5	2-5	1-3	2-5	2-5

ALIGNMENT

Alignment describes the broad ethos of thinking, reasoning creatures — those unintelligent sorts being placed within the *neutral* area because they are totally uncaring. Note that alignment does not necessarily dictate religious persuasion, although many religious beliefs will dictate alignment. As explained under **ALIGNMENT LANGUAGES** (q.v.) this aspect of alignment is not the major consideration. The overall behavior of the character (or creature) is delineated by alignment, or, in the case of player characters, behavior determines actual alignment. Therefore, besides defining the general tendencies of creatures, it also groups creatures into mutually acceptable or at least non-hostile divisions. This is not to say that groups of similarly aligned creatures cannot be opposed or even mortal enemies. Two nations, for example, with rulers of lawful good alignment can be at war. Bands of orcs can hate each other. But the former would possibly cease their war to oppose a massive invasion of orcs, just as the latter would make common cause against the lawful good men. Thus, alignment describes the world view of creatures and helps to define what their actions, reactions, and purposes will be. It likewise causes a player character to choose an ethos which is appropriate to his or her profession, and alignment also aids players in the definition and role approach of their respective game personae. With the usefulness of alignment determined, definition of the divisions is necessary.

Major Divisions:

There are two major divisions of four opposite points of view. All four are not mutually exclusive, although each pair is mutually opposed.

Law And Chaos: The opposition here is between organized groups and individuals. That is, law dictates that order and organization is necessary and

desirable, while chaos holds to the opposite view. Law generally supports the group as more important than the individual, while chaos promotes the individual over the group.

Good And Evil: Basically stated, the tenets of good are human rights, or in the case of **AD&D**, creature rights. Each creature is entitled to life, relative freedom, and the prospect of happiness. Cruelty and suffering are undesirable. Evil, on the other hand, does not concern itself with rights or happiness; purpose is the determinant.

There can never exist a lawful chaos or an evil good. These, and their reverses, are dichotomous. This is not to say that they cannot exist in the same character or creature if it is insane or controlled by another entity, but as general divisions they are mutually exclusive pairs. Consider also the alignment graph. If law is opposed to chaos, and good to evil, then the radically opposed alignments are lawful neutral — chaotic neutral, neutral good — neutral evil, lawful good — chaotic evil, and lawful evil — chaotic good. Lawful groups might, for example, combine to put down some chaotic threat, for example, just as readily as good groups would combine to suppress some powerful evil. Basic understanding and agreement, however, is within the general specific alignment, i.e. one of the nine categories. These are defined as follows:

NEUTRALITY: Absolute, or true, neutral creatures view everything which exists as an integral, necessary part or function of the entire cosmos. Each thing exists as a part of the whole, one as a check or balance to the other, with life necessary for death, happiness for suffering, good for evil, order for chaos, and vice versa. Nothing must ever become predominant or out of balance. Within this naturalistic ethos, humankind serves a role also, just as all other creatures do. They may be more or less important, but the neutral does not concern himself or herself with these considerations except where it is positively determined that the balance is threatened. Absolute neutrality is in the central or fulcrum position quite logically, as the neutral sees all other alignments as parts of a necessary whole. This alignment is the narrowest in scope.

NEUTRAL GOOD: Creatures of this alignment see the cosmos as a place where law and chaos are merely tools to use in bringing life, happiness, and prosperity to all deserving creatures. Order is not good unless it brings this to all; neither is randomness and total freedom desirable if it does not bring such good.

NEUTRAL EVIL: Similar to the neutral good alignment, that of neutral evil holds that neither groups nor individuals have great meaning. This ethos holds that seeking to promote weal for all actually brings woe to the truly deserving. Natural forces which are meant to cull out the weak and stupid are artificially suppressed by so-called good, and the fittest are wrongfully held back, so whatever means are expedient can be used by the powerful to gain and maintain their dominance, without concern for anything.

LAWFUL GOOD: Creatures of lawful good alignment view the cosmos with varying degrees of lawfulness or desire for good. They are convinced that order and law are absolutely necessary to assure good, and that good is best defined as whatever brings the most benefit to the greater number of decent, thinking creatures and the least woe to the rest.

LAWFUL NEUTRAL: It is the view of this alignment that law and order give purpose and meaning to everything. Without regimentation and strict definition, there would be no purpose in the cosmos. Therefore, whether a law is good or evil is of no import as long as it brings order and meaning.

LAWFUL EVIL: Obviously, all order is not good, nor are all laws beneficial. Lawful evil creatures consider order as the means by which each group is properly placed in the cosmos, from lowest to highest, strongest first, weakest last. Good is seen as an excuse to promote the mediocrity of the whole and suppress the better and more capable, while lawful evilness allows each group to structure itself and fix its place as compared to others, serving the stronger but being served by the weaker.

CHAOTIC GOOD: To the chaotic good individual, freedom and independence are as important to life and happiness. The ethos views this freedom as the only means by which each creature can achieve true satisfaction and happiness. Law, order, social forms, and anything else which tends to restrict or abridge individual freedom is wrong, and each individual is capable of achieving self-realization and prosperity through himself, herself, or itself.

DEATH HOUSE



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DEATH HOUSE

You can run *Curse of Strahd* for 1st-level characters with the help of this optional mini-adventure, which is designed to advance characters to 3rd level. Players creating 1st-level characters can use the haunted one character background in appendix A, or they can pick backgrounds from the *Player's Handbook* as normal.

Before the characters can explore the haunted townhouse known as Death House, you need to guide them to the village of Barovia. The “Creeping Fog” adventure hook in chapter 1 works best, as it introduces few distractions. Once the characters arrive in Strahd’s domain, steer them to the village. For the duration of this introductory adventure, any attempt by the characters to explore other locations in Strahd’s domain causes the mists of Ravenloft to block their path.

LEVEL ADVANCEMENT

In this mini-adventure, the characters gain levels by accomplishing specific goals, rather than by slaying monsters. These milestones are as follows:

- Characters who gain access to the secret stairs in the attic (area 21) advance to 2nd level. The stairs appear only under certain circumstances.
- Characters advance to 3rd level once they escape from the house (see the “Endings” section).

HISTORY

Death House is the name given to an old row house in the village of Barovia (area E7 on the village map). The house has been burned to the ground many times, only to rise from the ashes time and again—by its own will or that of Strahd. Locals give the building a wide berth for fear of antagonizing the evil spirits believed to haunt it.

The wealthy family that built the house practiced the dark arts. Through seduction and indoctrination, they expanded their cult to include a small yet nefarious circle of friends. When word got out, the rest of the village turned a blind eye to the house and the nightly debaucheries happening within it.

The cult tried to summon malevolent extraplanar entities with no success. The cultists also preyed on visitors, sacrificed them in bizarre rituals, and hosted morbid banquets to feast on their corpses. When nothing came of these ritualized murders, the cultists’ activities became thinly disguised excuses to indulge their lurid fantasies. The ranks of the cult thinned as members began to lose interest in the debacle.

Then Strahd von Zarovich arrived.

The cultists regarded Strahd as a messiah sent to them by the Dark Powers. Drawn to Strahd like moths to a flame, they pledged their devotion for a promise of immortality, but Strahd turned them away, deeming the cult and its leaders unworthy of his attention. The cultists withdrew to Death House in despair.

The cult’s habit of trapping and devouring wayward visitors proved to be its downfall. On one occasion, the cult snared a band of adventurers whom Strahd had lured to his domain to be his playthings. A black car-

riage arrived at Death House soon thereafter, and from out of its black heart stepped the vampire himself. The cultists tried to impress Strahd. In response, he slaughtered them for slaying his playthings. Centuries later, the cultists’ spirits haunt the dungeons under the house. The building itself, it seems, is unwilling to let the cult be forgotten.

ROSE AND THORN

The characters are pulled into Strahd’s domain by the mists of Ravenloft. Forced to follow a lonely road (area A), they eventually arrive at the village of Barovia (area E). Once they reach the village, read:

The gravel road leads to a village, its tall houses dark as tombstones. Nestled among these solemn dwellings are a handful of closed-up shops. Even the tavern is shut tight.

A soft whimpering draws your eye toward a pair of children standing in the middle of an otherwise lifeless street.

The children are ten-year-old Rosavalda (“Rose”) and her seven-year-old brother, Thornboldt (“Thorn”). Thorn is weeping and clutching a stuffed doll. Rose is trying to hush the boy.

If the characters approach the children or call out to them, add the following:

After shushing the boy, the girl turns to you and says, “There’s a monster in our house!” She then points to a tall brick row house that has seen better days. Its windows are dark. It has a gated portico on the ground floor, and the rusty gate is slightly ajar. The houses on either side are abandoned, their windows and doors boarded up.

Characters who question the children learn the following information:

- The children don’t know what the “monster” looks like, but they’ve heard its terrible howls.
- Their parents (Gustav and Elisabeth Durst) keep the monster trapped in the basement.
- There’s a baby (Walter) in the third-floor nursery. (Untrue, but the children believe it.)

Rose and Thorn say that they won’t go back in the house until they know the monster is gone. They can be convinced to wait in the portico (area 1A) while the characters search the house. Although they appear to be flesh-and-blood children, Rose and Thorn are actually illusions created by the house to lure the characters inside. The children don’t know that they’re illusions but vanish if attacked or forced into the house.

The children died of starvation centuries ago after their insane parents locked them in the attic and forgot about them. They were too young and innocent to understand that their parents were guilty of heinous crimes. Their parents told them stories about a monster in the basement to keep the children from going down to the dungeon level. The “terrible howls” they heard were actually the screams of the cult’s victims.



THORNBOLDT
“THORN” DURST

ROSAVALDA
“ROSE” DURST

THE MISTS

Characters who remain outside the house can see the mists close in around them, swallowing up the rest of the village. As more buildings disappear into the mists, the characters are left with little choice but to seek refuge in the house. The mists stop short of entering the house but engulf anyone outside (see chapter 2, “The Lands of Barovia,” for information on the mists’ effect).

AREAS OF THE HOUSE

The following areas correspond to labels on the map of the house on page 216.

1. ENTRANCE

A wrought-iron gate with hinges on one side and a lock on the other fills the archway of a stone portico (area 1A). The gate is unlocked, and its rusty hinges shriek when the gate is opened. Oil lamps hang from the portico ceiling by chains, flanking a set of oaken doors that open into a grand foyer (area 1B).

Hanging on the south wall of the foyer is a shield emblazoned with a coat-of-arms (a stylized golden

DEATH HOUSE’S FEATURES

Death House is aware of its surroundings and all creatures within it. Its goal is to continue the work of the cult by luring visitors to their doom. Various important features of the house are summarized here.

The house has four stories (including the attic), with two balconies on the third floor—one facing the front of the house, the other facing the back. The house has wooden floors throughout, and all windows have hinges that allow them to swing outward.

The rooms on the first and second floors are free of dust and signs of age. The floorboards and wall panels are well oiled, the drapes and wallpaper haven’t faded, and the furniture looks new. No effort has been made to preserve the contents of the third floor or the attic. These areas are dusty and drafty, everything within them is old and draped in cobwebs, and the floorboards groan underfoot.

Ceilings vary in height by floor. The first floor has 10-foot-high ceilings, the second floor has 12-foot-high ceilings, the third floor has 8-foot-high ceilings, and the attic has 13-foot-high ceilings.

None of the rooms in the house are lit when the characters arrive, although most areas contain working oil lamps or fireplaces.

Characters can burn the house to the ground if they want, but any destruction to the house is temporary. After 1d10 days, the house begins to repair itself. Ashes sweep together to form blackened timbers, which then turn back into a sturdy wooden frame around which walls begin to materialize. Destroyed furnishings are likewise repaired. It takes 2d6 hours for the house to complete its resurrection. Items taken from the house aren’t replaced, nor are undead that are destroyed. The dungeon level isn’t considered part of the house and can’t repair itself in this fashion.

windmill on a red field), flanked by framed portraits of stony-faced aristocrats (long-dead members of the Durst family). Mahogany-framed double doors leading from the foyer to the main hall (area 2A) are set with panes of stained glass.

2. MAIN HALL

A wide hall (area 2A) runs the width of the house, with a black marble fireplace at one end and a sweeping, red marble staircase at the other. Mounted on the wall above the fireplace is a longsword (nonmagical) with a windmill cameo worked into the hilt. The wood-paneled walls are ornately sculpted with images of vines, flowers, nymphs, and satyrs. Characters who search the walls for secret doors or otherwise inspect the paneling can, with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, see serpents and skulls inconspicuously woven into the wall designs. The decorative paneling follows the staircase as it circles upward to the second floor.

A cloakroom (area 2B) has several black cloaks hanging from hooks on the walls. A top hat sits on a high shelf.

3. DEN OF WOLVES

This oak-paneled room looks like a hunter’s den. Mounted above the fireplace is a stag’s head, and positioned around the outskirts of the room are three stuffed wolves.

Two padded chairs draped in animal furs face the hearth, with an oak table between them supporting a cask of wine, two carved wooden goblets, a pipe rack, and a candelabrum. A chandelier hangs above a cloth-covered table surrounded by four chairs.

Two cabinets stand against the walls. The east cabinet sports a lock that can be picked with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check. It holds a heavy crossbow, a light crossbow, a hand crossbow, and 20 bolts for each weapon. The north cabinet is unlocked and holds a small box containing a deck of playing cards and an assortment of wine glasses.

TRAPDOOR

A trapdoor is hidden in the southwest corner of the floor. It can't be detected or opened until the characters approach it from the underside (see area 32). Until then, Death House supernaturally hides the trapdoor.

4. KITCHEN AND PANTRY

The kitchen (area 4A) is tidy, with dishware, cookware, and utensils neatly placed on shelves. A worktable has a cutting board and rolling pin atop it. A stone, dome-shaped oven stands near the east wall, its bent iron stovepipe connecting to a hole in the ceiling. Behind the stove and to the left is a thin door leading to a well-stocked pantry (area 4B). All the food in the pantry appears fresh but tastes bland.

DUMBWAITER

Behind a small door in the southwest corner of the kitchen is a dumbwaiter—a 2-foot-wide stone shaft containing a wooden elevator box attached to a simple rope-and-pulley mechanism that must be operated manually. The shaft connects to areas 7A (the servants' quarters) and 12A (the master bedroom). Hanging on the wall next to the dumbwaiter is a tiny brass bell attached by wires to buttons in those other areas.

A Small character can squeeze into the elevator box with a successful DC 10 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. The dumbwaiter's rope-and-pulley mechanism can support 200 pounds of weight before breaking.

5. DINING ROOM

The centerpiece of this wood-paneled dining room is a carved mahogany table surrounded by eight high-backed chairs with sculpted armrests and cushioned seats. A crystal chandelier hangs above the table, which is covered with resplendent silverware and crystalware polished to a dazzling shine. Mounted above the marble fireplace is a mahogany-framed painting of an alpine vale.

The wall paneling is carved with elegant images of deer among the trees. Characters who search the walls for secret doors or otherwise inspect the paneling can, with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, see twisted faces carved into the tree trunks and wolves lurking amid the carved foliage.

Red silk drapes cover the windows, and a tapestry depicting hunting dogs and horse-mounted aristocrats chasing after a wolf hangs from an iron rod bolted to the south wall.

The silverware tarnishes, the crystal cracks, the portrait fades, and the tapestry rots if removed from the house.

6. UPPER HALL

Unlit oil lamps are mounted on the walls of this elegant hall. Hanging above the mantelpiece is a wood-framed portrait of the Durst family: Gustav and Elisabeth Durst with their two smiling children, Rose and Thorn. Cradled in the father's arms is a swaddled baby, which the mother regards with a hint of scorn.

Standing suits of armor flank wooden doors in the east and west walls. Each suit of armor clutches a spear and has a visored helm shaped like a wolf's head. The doors are carved with dancing youths, although close inspection and a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the youths aren't really dancing but fighting off swarms of bats.

The red marble staircase that started on the first floor continues its upward spiral to area 11. A cold draft can be felt coming down the steps.

7. SERVANTS' ROOM

An undecorated bedroom (area 7A) contains a pair of beds with straw-stuffed mattresses. At the foot of each bed is an empty footlocker. Tidy servants' uniforms hang from hooks in the adjoining closet (area 7B).

DUMBWAITER

A dumbwaiter in the corner of the west wall has a button on the wall next to it. Pressing the button rings the tiny bell in area 4A.

8. LIBRARY

The master of the house used to spend many hours here before his descent into madness.

Red velvet drapes cover the windows of this room. An exquisite mahogany desk and a matching high-back chair face the entrance and the fireplace, above which hangs a framed picture of a windmill perched atop a rocky crag. Situated in corners of the room are two overstuffed chairs. Floor-to-ceiling bookshelves line the south wall. A rolling wooden ladder allows one to more easily reach the high shelves.

The desk has several items resting atop it: an oil lamp, a jar of ink, a quill pen, a tinderbox, and a letter kit containing a red wax candle, four blank sheets of parchment, and a wooden seal bearing the Durst family's insignia (a windmill). The desk drawer is empty except for an iron key, which unlocks the door to area 20.

The bookshelves hold hundreds of tomes covering a range of topics including history, warfare, and alchemy. There are also several shelves containing first-edition collected works of poetry and fiction. The books rot and fall apart if taken from the house.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door behind one bookshelf can be unlocked and swung open by pulling on a switch disguised to look like a red-covered book with a blank spine. A character inspecting the bookshelf spots the fake book with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. Unless the secret door is propped open, springs in the hinges cause it to close on its own. Beyond the secret door lies area 9.

9. SECRET ROOM

This secret room contains bookshelves packed with tomes describing fiend-summoning rituals and the necromantic rituals of a cult called the Priests of Osybus. The rituals are bogus, which any character can ascertain after studying the books for 1 hour and succeeding on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

A heavy wooden chest with clawed iron feet stands against the south wall, its lid half-closed. Sticking out of the chest is a skeleton in leather armor. Close inspection reveals that the skeleton belongs to a human who triggered a poisoned dart trap. Three darts are stuck in the dead adventurer's armor and ribcage. The dart-firing mechanism inside the chest no longer functions.

Clutched in the skeleton's left hand is a letter bearing the seal of Strahd von Zarovich, which the adventurer tried to remove from the chest. Written in flowing script, the letter reads as follows:

My most pathetic servant,

I am not a messiah sent to you by the Dark Powers of this land. I have not come to lead you on a path to immortality. However many souls you have bled on your hidden altar, however many visitors you have tortured in your dungeon, know that you are not the ones who brought me to this beautiful land. You are but worms writhing in my earth.

You say that you are cursed, your fortunes spent. You abandoned love for madness, took solace in the bosom of another woman, and sired a stillborn son. Cursed by darkness? Of that I have no doubt. Save you from your wretchedness? I think not. I much prefer you as you are.

*Your dread lord and master,
Strahd von Zarovich*

TREASURE

The chest contains three blank books with black leather covers (worth 25 gp each), three spell scrolls (*bless*, *protection from poison*, and *spiritual weapon*), the deed to the house, the deed to a windmill, and a signed will. The windmill referred to in the second deed is situated in the mountains east of Vallaki (see chapter 6, "Old Bonegrinder"). The will is signed by Gustav and Elisabeth Durst and bequeathes the house, the windmill, and all other family property to Rosavalda and Thornboldt Durst in the event of their parents' deaths. The books, scrolls, deeds, and will age markedly if taken from the house but remain intact.

10. CONSERVATORY

Gossamer drapes cover the windows of this elegantly appointed hall, which has a brass-plated chandelier

hanging from the ceiling. Upholstered chairs line the walls, and stained-glass wall hangings depict beautiful men, women, and children singing and playing instruments.

A harpsichord with a bench rests in the northwest corner. Near the fireplace is a large standing harp. Alabaster figurines of well-dressed dancers adorn the mantelpiece. Close inspection of them reveals that several are carvings of well-dressed skeletons.

11. BALCONY

Characters who climb the red marble staircase to its full height come to a dusty balcony with a suit of black plate armor standing against one wall, draped in cobwebs. This suit of **animated armor** attacks as soon as it takes damage or a character approaches within 5 feet of it. It fights until destroyed.

Oil lamps are mounted on the oak-paneled walls, which are carved with woodland scenes of trees, falling leaves, and tiny critters. Characters who search the walls for secret doors or otherwise inspect the paneling can, with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, notice tiny corpses hanging from the trees and worms bursting up from the ground.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the west wall can be found with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. It pushes open easily to reveal a cobweb-filled wooden staircase leading up to the attic.

12. MASTER SUITE

The double doors to this room have dusty panes of stained glass set into them. Designs in the glass resemble windmills.

The dusty, cobweb-filled master bedroom (area 12A) has burgundy drapes covering the windows. Furnishings include a four-poster bed with embroidered curtains and tattered gossamer veils, a matching pair of empty wardrobes, a vanity with a wood-framed mirror and jewelry box (see "Treasure"), and a padded chair. A rotting tiger-skin rug lies on the floor in front of the fireplace, which has a dust-covered portrait of Gustav and Elisabeth Durst hanging above it. A web-filled parlor in the southwest corner contains a table and two chairs. Resting on the dusty tablecloth is an empty porcelain bowl and a matching jug.

A door facing the foot of the bed has a full-length mirror mounted on it. The door opens to reveal an empty, dust-choked closet (area 12B). A door in the parlor leads to an outside balcony (area 12C).

DUMBWAITER

A dumbwaiter in the corner of the west wall has a button on the wall next to it. Pressing the button rings the tiny bell in area 4A.

TREASURE

The jewelry box on the vanity is made of silver with gold filigree (worth 75 gp). It contains three gold rings (worth 25 gp each) and a thin platinum necklace with a topaz pendant (worth 750 gp).

13. BATHROOM

This dark room contains a wooden tub with clawed feet, a small iron stove with a kettle resting atop it, and a barrel under a spigot in the east wall. A cistern on the roof used to collect rainwater, which was borne down a pipe to the spigot; however, the plumbing no longer works.

14. STORAGE ROOM

Dusty shelves line the walls of this room. A few of the shelves have folded sheets, blankets, and old bars of soap on them. A cobweb-covered **broom of animated attack** (see appendix D) leans against the far wall; it attacks any creature approaching within 5 feet of it.

15. NURSEMAID'S SUITE

Dust and cobwebs shroud an elegantly appointed bedroom (area 15A) and an adjoining nursery (area 15B). Double doors set with panes of stained glass pull open to reveal a balcony (area 15C) overlooking the front of the house.

The bedroom once belonged to the family's nursemaid. The master of the house and the nursemaid had an affair, which led to the birth of a stillborn baby named Walter. The cult slew the nursemaid shortly thereafter. Unless the characters already defeated it in area 18, the nursemaid's spirit haunts the bedroom as a **specter**. The specter manifests and attacks when a character opens the door to the nursery. The specter resembles a terrified, skeletally thin young woman; it can't speak or be reasoned with.

The bedroom contains a large bed, two end tables, and an empty wardrobe. Mounted on the wall next to the wardrobe is a full-length mirror with an ornate wooden frame carved to look like ivy and berries. Characters who search the wall for secret doors or otherwise inspect the mirror can, with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check, notice eyeballs among the berries. The wall behind the mirror has a secret door in it (see "Secret Door" below).

The nursery contains a crib covered with a hanging black shroud. When characters part the shroud, they see a tightly wrapped, baby-sized bundle lying in the crib. Characters who unwrap the blanket find nothing inside it.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door behind the mirror can be found with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. It pushes open easily to reveal a cobweb-filled wooden staircase leading up to the attic.

16. ATTIC HALL

This bare hall is choked with dust and cobwebs.

LOCKED DOOR

The door to area 20 is held shut with a padlock. Its key is kept in the library (area 8), but the lock can also be picked with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check.

17. SPARE BEDROOM

This dust-choked room contains a slender bed, a nightstand, a small iron stove, a writing desk with a stool, an empty wardrobe, and a rocking chair. A smiling doll in a lacy yellow dress sits in the northern window box, cobwebs draping it like a wedding veil.

18. STORAGE ROOM

This dusty chamber is packed with old furniture (chairs, coat racks, standing mirrors, dress mannequins, and the like), all draped in dusty white sheets. Near an iron stove, underneath one of the sheets, is an unlocked wooden trunk containing the skeletal remains of the family's nursemaid, wrapped in a tattered bedsheet stained with dry blood. A character inspecting the remains and succeeding on a DC 14 Wisdom (Medicine) check can verify that the woman was stabbed to death by multiple knife wounds.

If the characters disturb the remains, the nursemaid's **specter** appears and attacks unless it was previously defeated in area 15.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the east wall appears only when certain conditions are met; see area 21 for more information.

19. SPARE BEDROOM

This web-filled room contains a slender bed, a nightstand, a rocking chair, an empty wardrobe, and a small iron stove.

20. CHILDREN'S ROOM

The door to this room is locked from the outside (see area 16 for details).

This room contains a bricked-up window flanked by two dusty, wood-framed beds sized for children. Closer to the door is a toy chest with windmills painted on its sides and a dollhouse that's a perfect replica of the dreary edifice in which you stand. These furnishings are draped in cobwebs. Lying in the middle of the floor are two small skeletons wearing tattered but familiar clothing. The smaller of the two cradles a stuffed doll that you also recognize.

The Durst children, Rose and Thorn, were neglected by their parents and locked in this room until they starved to death. Their small skeletons lie in the middle of the floor, plain as day, wearing tattered clothing that the characters recognize as belonging to the children. Thorn's skeleton cradles the boy's stuffed doll.

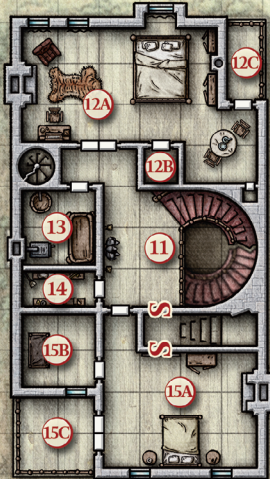
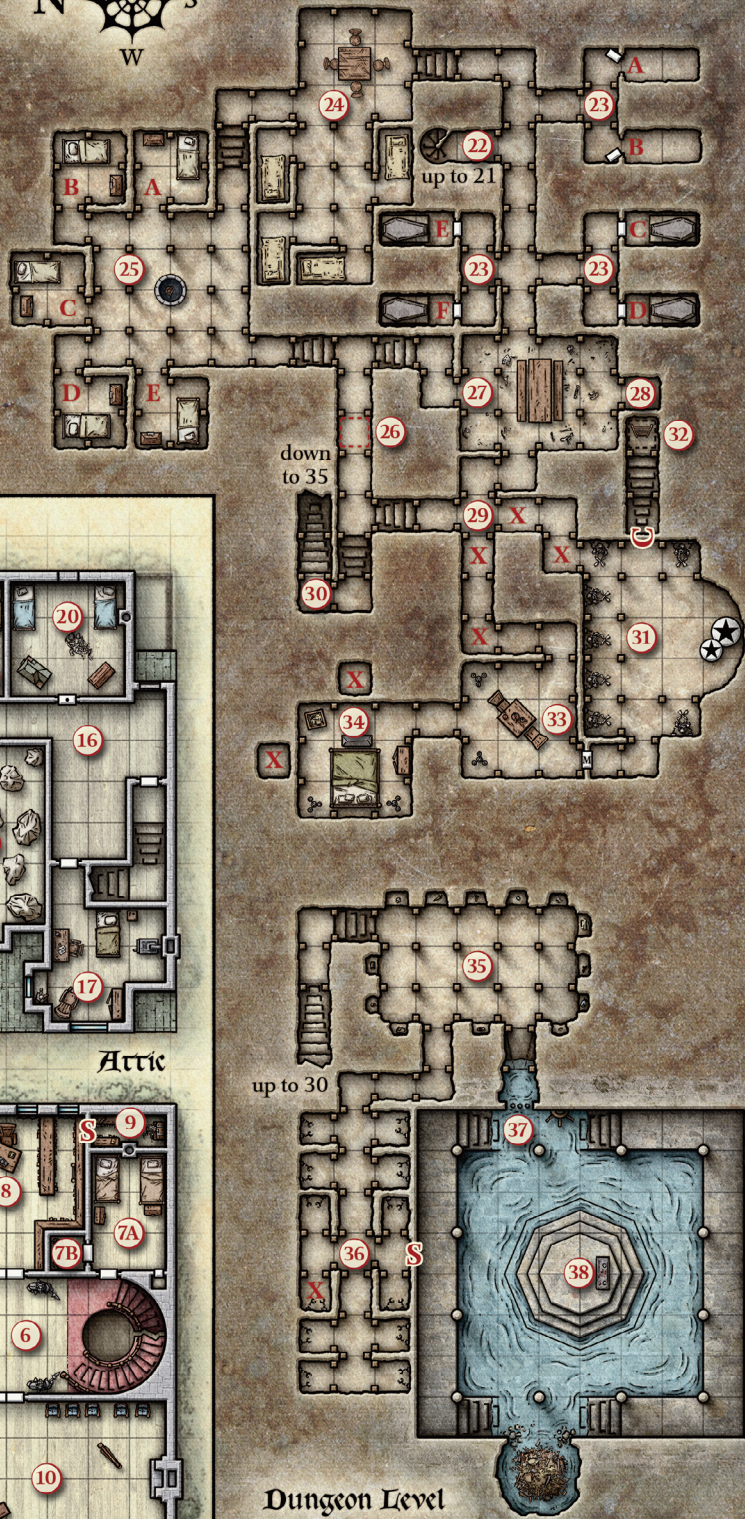
The toy chest contains an assortment of stuffed animals and toys. Characters who search the dollhouse and succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check find all of the house's secret doors, including one in the attic that leads to a spiral staircase (a miniature replica of area 21).



Front View



Death House



Third Floor



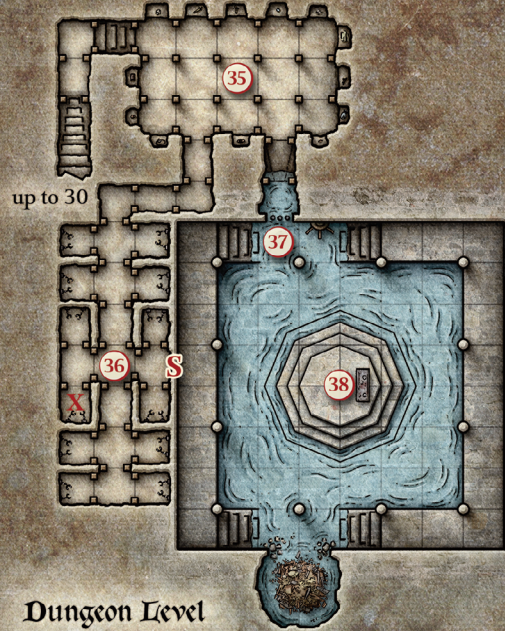
Attic



First Floor



Second Floor



Dungeon Level

One square = 5 feet

ROSE AND THORN

If either the dollhouse or the chest is disturbed, the ghosts of Rose and Thorn appear in the middle of the room. Use the **ghost** statistics in the *Monster Manual*, with the following modifications:

- The ghosts are Small and lawful good.
- They have 35 (10d6) hit points each.
- They lack the Horrifying Visage action.
- They speak Common and have a challenge rating of 3 (700 XP).

The children don't like it when the characters disturb their toys, but they fight only in self-defense. Unlike the illusions outside the house, these children know that they're dead. If asked how they died, Rose and Thorn explain that their parents locked them in the attic to protect them from "the monster in the basement," and that they died from hunger. If asked how one gets to the basement, Rose points to the dollhouse and says, "There's a secret door in the attic." Characters who then search the dollhouse for secret doors gain advantage on their Wisdom (Perception) checks to find them.

The children fear abandonment. If one or more characters try to leave, the ghost-children attempt to possess them. If one of the ghosts possesses a character, allow the player to retain control of the character, but assign the character one of the following flaws:

- A character possessed by Rose gains the following flaw: "I like being in charge and get angry when other people tell me what to do."
- A character possessed by Thorn gains the following flaw: "I'm scared of everything, including my own shadow, and weep with despair when things don't go my way."

A character possessed by the ghost of Rose or Thorn won't willingly leave Death House or the dungeon below it. Both ghosts can be intimidated into leaving their hosts with a successful DC 11 Charisma (Intimidation) check made as an action.

A ghost reduced to 0 hit points can reform at dawn the next day. The only way to put the children's spirits to rest is to put their skeletal remains in their tombs (areas 23E and 23F). The children don't know this, however.

DEVELOPMENT

If the party lays the children's spirits to rest, each character gains inspiration (see "Inspiration" in chapter 4, "Personality and Background," of the *Player's Handbook*).

21. SECRET STAIRS

A narrow spiral staircase made of creaky wood is contained within a 5-foot-wide shaft of mortared stone that starts in the attic and descends 50 feet to the dungeon level, passing through the lower levels of the house as it makes its descent. Thick cobwebs fill the shaft and reduce visibility in the staircase to 5 feet.

The secret door and shaft don't exist until the house reveals them, which can happen in one of two ways:

- The characters find Strahd's letter in the secret room behind the library (area 9).

DUNGEON FEATURES

The dungeon level underneath Death House is carved out of earth, clay, and rock. The tunnels are 4 feet wide by 7 feet high with timber braces at 5-foot intervals. Rooms are 8 feet tall and supported by thick wooden posts with crossbeams. The only exception is area 38, which has a 16-foot-high ceiling supported by stone pillars. Characters without darkvision must provide their own light sources, as the dungeon is unlit.

As the characters explore the dungeon, they see centuries-old human footprints in the earthen floor leading every which way.

- The characters find the replica secret door in the attic of the dollhouse (area 20).

Once the house wills the secret door into existence, characters find it automatically if they search the wall (no ability check required). Characters who descend the spiral staircase end up in area 22.

22. DUNGEON LEVEL ACCESS

The wooden spiral staircase from the attic ends here. A narrow tunnel stretches southward before branching east and west.

GHOSTLY CHANTING

From the moment they arrive in the dungeon, the characters can hear an eerie, incessant chant echoing throughout. It's impossible to gauge where the sound is coming from until the characters reach area 26 or 29. They can't discern its words until they reach area 35.

23. FAMILY CRYPTS

Several crypts have been hewn from the earth. Each crypt is sealed with a stone slab unless noted otherwise. Removing a slab from its fitting requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check; using a crowbar or the like grants advantage on the check.

23A. EMPTY CRYPT

The blank stone slab meant to seal this crypt leans against a nearby wall. The crypt is empty.

23B. WALTER'S CRYPT

The stone slab meant to seal this crypt leans against a nearby wall. Etched into it is the name Walter Durst. The crypt is empty.

23C. GUSTAV'S CRYPT

The stone slab is etched with the name Gustav Durst. The chamber beyond contains an empty coffin atop a stone bier.

23D. ELISABETH'S CRYPT

The stone slab is etched with the name Elisabeth Durst. The crypt contains a stone bier with an empty coffin atop it. A **swarm of insects** (centipedes) boils out of the back wall and attacks if the coffin is disturbed.

23E. ROSE'S CRYPT

The stone slab is etched with the name Rosavalda Durst. The chamber beyond contains an empty coffin on a stone bier.

If Rose's skeletal remains (see area 20) are placed in the coffin, the child's ghost finds peace and disappears forever. A character possessed by Rose's ghost when this occurs is no longer possessed (see also the "Development" section in area 20).

23F. THORN'S CRYPT

The stone slab is etched with the name Thornboldt Durst. The chamber beyond contains an empty coffin on a stone bier.

If Thorn's skeletal remains (see area 20) are placed in the coffin, the child's ghost finds peace and disappears forever. A character possessed by Thorn's ghost when this occurs is no longer possessed (see also the "Development" section in area 20).

24. CULT INITIATES' QUARTERS

A wooden table and four chairs stand at the east end of this room. To the west are four alcoves containing moldy straw pallets.

25. WELL AND CULTIST QUARTERS

A 4-foot-diameter well shaft with a 3-foot-high stone lip descends 30 feet to a water-filled cistern. A wooden bucket hangs from a rope-and-pulley mechanism bolted to the crossbeams above the well.

Five side rooms once served as quarters for senior cultists. Each contains a wood-framed bed with a moldy straw mattress and a wooden chest to hold personal belongings. Each chest is secured with a rusty iron padlock that can be picked with thieves' tools and a successful DC 15 Dexterity check.

TREASURE

In addition to some worthless personal effects, each chest contains one or more valuable items.

- 25A.** This room's chest contains 11 gp and 60 sp in a pouch made of human skin.
- 25B.** This room's chest contains three moss agates (worth 10 gp each) in a folded piece of black cloth.
- 25C.** This room's chest contains a black leather eyepatch with a carnelian (worth 50 gp) sewn into it.
- 25D.** This room's chest contains an ivory hairbrush with silver bristles (worth 25 gp).
- 25E.** This room's chest contains a silvered shortsword (worth 110 gp).

26. HIDDEN SPIKED PIT

The ghostly chanting heard throughout the dungeon gets discernibly louder as one heads west along this tunnel. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals an absence of footprints. Characters searching the floor for traps find a 5-foot-long, 10-foot-deep pit hidden under several rotted wooden planks, all hidden under a thin layer of dirt. The pit has sharpened wooden spikes at the bottom. The first character to step on the cover falls through, landing prone and taking 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage from the fall plus 11 (2d10) piercing damage from the spikes.

27. DINING HALL

This room contains a plain wooden table flanked by long benches. Moldy humanoid bones lie strewn on the dirt floor—the remains of the cult's vile banquets.

In the middle of the south wall is a darkened alcove (area 28). Characters who approach within 5 feet of the alcove provoke the creature that lurks there.

28. LARDER

This alcove contains a **grick** that slithers out to attack the first character it sees within 5 feet of it. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score under 12 is surprised by it. The alcove is otherwise empty.

29. GHOULISH ENCOUNTER

The ghostly chanting heard throughout the dungeon is noticeably louder to the north. When one or more characters reach the midpoint of the four-way tunnel intersection, four **ghouls** (former cultists) rise up out of the ground in the spaces marked X on the map and attack. The ghouls fight until destroyed.

30. STAIRS DOWN

It's obvious to any character standing at the top of this 20-foot-long staircase that the ghostly chants originate from somewhere below. Characters who descend the stairs and follow the hall beyond arrive in area 35.

31. DARKLORD'S SHRINE

This room is festooned with moldy skeletons that hang from rusty shackles against the walls. A wide alcove in the south wall contains a painted wooden statue carved in the likeness of a gaunt, pale-faced man wearing a voluminous black cloak, his pale left hand resting on the head of a wolf that stands next to him. In his right hand, he holds a smoky-gray crystal orb.

The room has exits in the west and north walls. Chanting can be heard coming from the west.

The statue depicts Strahd, to whom the cultists made sacrifices in the vain hope that he might reveal his darkest secrets to them. If the characters touch the statue or take the crystal orb from Strahd's hand, five **shadows** form around the statue and attack them. The shadows (the spirits of former cultists) pursue those who flee beyond the room's confines.

The skeletons on the wall are harmless decor.

CONCEALED DOOR

Characters searching the room for secret doors find a concealed door in the middle of the east wall with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check. It's basically an ordinary (albeit rotted) wooden door hidden under a layer of clay. The door pulls open to reveal a stone staircase that climbs 10 feet to a landing (area 32).

TREASURE

The crystal orb is worth 25 gp. It can be used as an arcane focus but is not magical.

32. HIDDEN TRAPDOOR

The staircase ends at a landing with a 6-foot-high ceiling of close-fitting planks with a wooden trapdoor set into it. The trapdoor is bolted shut from this side and can be pushed open to reveal the den (area 3) above.

DEVELOPMENT

Once the trapdoor has been found and opened, it remains available to characters as a way into and out of the dungeon level.

33. CULT LEADERS' DEN

The door in the southwest corner is a **mimic** in disguise. Any creature that touches the door becomes adhered to the creature, whereupon the mimic attacks. The mimic also attacks if its takes any damage.

A chandelier is suspended above a table in the middle of the room. Two high-backed chairs flank the table, which has an empty clay jug and two clay flagons atop it. Iron candlesticks stand in two corners, their candles long since melted away.

34. CULT LEADERS' QUARTERS

This room contains a large wood-framed bed with a rotted feather mattress, a wardrobe containing several old robes, a pair of iron candlesticks, and an open crate containing thirty torches and a leather sack with fifteen candles inside it. At the foot of the bed is an unlocked wooden footlocker containing some gear and magic items (see "Treasure" below).

Two **ghasts** (Gustav and Elisabeth Durst) are hidden in cavities behind the earthen walls, marked X on the map; they burst forth and attack if someone removes one or more items from the footlocker. The ghasts wear tattered black robes.

TREASURE

Characters searching the footlocker find a folded *cloak of protection*, a small wooden coffer (unlocked) containing four *potions of healing*, a chain shirt, a mess kit, a flask of alchemist's fire, a bullseye lantern, a set of thieves' tools, and a spellbook with a yellow leather cover containing the following wizard spells:

1st level: *disguise self*, *identify*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *protection from evil and good*

2nd level: *darkvision*, *hold person*, *invisibility*, *magic weapon*

These items were taken from adventurers who were drawn into Barovia, captured, and killed by the cult.

35. RELIQUARY

The ghostly chant emanating from area 38 fills this room. Characters can discern a dozen or so voices saying, over and over, "He is the Ancient. He is the Land."

The cult amassed several "relics" that it used in its rituals. These worthless items are stored in thirteen niches along the walls:

- A small, mummified, yellow hand with sharp claws (a goblin's hand) on a loop of rope
- A knife carved from a human bone
- A dagger with a rat's skull set into the pommel
- An 8-inch-diameter varnished orb made from a nothic's eye
- An aspergillum carved from bone
- A folded cloak made from stitched ghoulish skin
- A desiccated frog lashed to a stick (could be mistaken for a *wand of polymorph*)
- A bag full of bat guano
- A hag's severed finger
- A 6-inch-tall wooden figurine of a mummy, its arms crossed over its chest
- An iron pendant adorned with a devil's face
- The shrunken, shriveled head of a halfling
- A small wooden coffer containing a dire wolf's withered tongue

The southernmost tunnel slopes down at a 20-degree angle into murky water and ends at a rusty portcullis (area 37).

36. PRISON

The cultists shackled prisoners to the back walls of alcoves here. The prisoners are long gone (their bones litter the floor in area 27), but the rusty shackles remain.

SECRET DOOR

A secret door in the south wall can be found with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check and pulls open to reveal area 38 beyond.

TREASURE

Hanging on the back wall of the cell marked X on the map is a human skeleton clad in a tattered black robe. The skeleton belongs to a cult member who questioned the cult's blind devotion to Strahd. Characters who search the skeleton find a gold ring (worth 25 gp) on one of its bony fingers.

37. PORTCULLIS

This tunnel is blocked by a rusty iron portcullis that can be forcibly lifted with a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. Otherwise, the portcullis can be raised or lowered by turning a wooden wheel half-embedded in the east wall of area 38. (The wheel is beyond the reach of someone east of the portcullis.) The floor around the portcullis is submerged under 2 feet of murky water.

38. RITUAL CHAMBER

The cult used to perform rituals in this sunken room. The chanting heard throughout the dungeon originates here, yet when the characters arrive, the dungeon falls silent as the chanting mysteriously stops.

The chanting stops as you peer into this forty-foot-square room. The smooth masonry walls provide excellent acoustics. Featureless stone pillars support the ceiling, and a breach in the west wall leads to a dark cave heaped with refuse. Murky water covers most of the floor. Stairs lead up to dry stone ledges that hug the walls. In the middle of the room, more stairs rise to form an octagonal dais that also rises above the water. Rusty chains with shackles dangle from the ceiling directly above a stone altar mounted on the dais. The altar is carved with hideous depictions of grasping ghouls and is stained with dry blood.

The water is 2 feet deep. The ledges and central dais are 5 feet high (3 feet higher than the water's surface), and the chamber's ceiling is 16 feet high (11 feet above the dais and ledges). The chains dangling from the ceiling are 8 feet long; the cultists would shackle prisoners to the chains, dangle them above the altar, cut them open with knives, and allow the altar to be bathed in blood.

Half embedded in the east wall is a wooden wheel connected to hidden chains and mechanisms. A character can use an action to turn the wheel, raising or lowering the nearby portcullis (see area 37).

The hole in the west wall leads to a naturally formed alcove. The half-submerged pile of refuse that fills it is a **shambling mound**, which the cultists dubbed Lorghoth the Decayer. It is asleep but awakens if attacked or if the characters summon the cultists but refuse to complete their ritual (see "One Must Die!" below). A character standing next to the mound can discern its true nature with a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check.

"ONE MUST DIE!"

If any character climbs to the top of the dais, read:

The chanting rises once more as thirteen dark apparitions appear on the ledges overlooking the room. Each one resembles a black-robed figure holding a torch, but the torch's fire is black and seems to draw light into it. Where you'd expect to see faces are voids.

"One must die!" they chant, over and over. "One must die! One must die!"

The apparitions are harmless figments that can't be damaged, turned, or dispelled.

Characters on the dais when the cultists appear must sacrifice a creature on the altar or face the cult's wrath; characters can ascertain what must be done with a successful DC 11 Intelligence (Religion) or Wisdom (Insight) check. To count as a sacrifice, a creature must die on the altar. The apparitions don't care what kind of creature is sacrificed, and they aren't fooled by illusions.

If the characters make the sacrifice, the cultists fade away, but their tireless chant of "He is the Ancient. He is the Land," echoes again in the dungeon. Strahd is aware

of the sacrifice, and Death House now does nothing to hinder the characters (see "Endings" below).

If the characters leave the dais without making the sacrifice, the cultists' chant changes: "Lorghoth the Decayer, we awaken thee!" This chant rouses the shambling mound and prompts it to attack. It pursues prey beyond the room but won't leave the dungeon. It can move through tunnels without squeezing and completely fills its space. At the start of the shambling mound's first turn, the chant changes again: "The end comes! Death, be praised!" If the shambling mound dies, the chanting stops and the apparitions vanish forever.

ENDINGS

The mists of Ravenloft continue to surround Death House until the characters stand atop the dais and either appease or defy the cultists. Strahd is satisfied either way, prompting the mists to recede.

THE CULT IS APPEASED

Death House harbors no ill will toward a party willing to sacrifice a life to appease the cult. Once the sacrifice is made, the characters are free to go. Upon emerging from the house, the characters advance to 3rd level.

THE CULT IS DENIED

If the characters deny the cult its sacrifice and either destroy the shambling mound or escape from it, Death House attacks them as they try to leave. When they return upstairs, they must roll initiative as they discover several architectural changes:

- All the windows are bricked up; the bricked-up windows and the outer walls are impervious to the party's weapon attacks and damage-dealing spells.
- All the doors are gone, replaced by slashing scythe-blades. A character must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to pass through a blade-trapped doorway unscathed. A character who spends 1 minute studying the blades in a particular doorway can try to take advantage of a momentary gap in their repeating movements and make a DC 15 Intelligence check instead. Failing either check, a character takes 2d10 slashing damage but manages to pass through the doorway. Any creature pushed through a doorway must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take the damage. The blades can't be disarmed.
- Every room that contains a fireplace, an oven, or a stove is filled with poisonous black smoke. The room is heavily obscured, and any creature that starts its turn in the smoke must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 1d10 poison damage.
- The interior walls become rotted and brittle. Each 5-foot-section has AC 5 and 5 hit points, and can also be destroyed with a successful DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check. Each 5-foot section of wall that's destroyed causes a **swarm of rats** to pour out and attack. The swarm won't leave the house.

Keep track of initiative as the characters make their way through the house. Once they escape, they advance to 3rd level, and the house does no more to harm them.



Cosplay: Dress To Kill

From rocking the Dungeon Master look to dressing as Darth Vader and the Predator, professional and amateur cosplayers talk us through their characters.

If you're looking for ideas for Halloween-themed costumes there are some amazing cosplayers to draw inspiration from. Whatever your age, background or skill level you can still pull off an amazing costume this Halloween.

Dragon+ spoke to five very different people about their costumed adventures—some D&D-related, some not—to inspire you to bring the wow factor when it comes to donning cool threads this Halloween. In the United Kingdom they call this “fancy dress”, and dress doesn't get much fancier than the outfits our interviewees wear...

“I'm a first edition D&D player from the old days when there weren't any very well-known characters,” says David Baxter, also known as

Larger Than Life Cosplay, who not only appeared at the **Stream of Many Eyes** but also participated in the inaugural D&D Founders & Legends Day event as a player in **Mike Mearls' game**. Baxter explains that he likes to create “generic knights and fighters, which are riffs off my Sandor Clegane/The Hound cosplay from *Game of Thrones*. I'd love to do an Arkhan cosplay if I could get a great mask made.”



Baxter's cosplay journey began when he saw *Star Wars* on the big screen back in 1977. “I was 13 when *Star Wars* came out and I was hooked,” he says. “I actually did one of my first cosplays as Darth Vader when *Return of the Jedi* came out with a totally homemade costume.”

Cosplaying as the Sith Lord also resulted in one of the best reactions he's had: “That first time I got out of the car dressed as Vader at *Return of the Jedi* was incredible. So many hundreds of people cheering me on was quite a rush.”

When Baxter moved to Los Angeles in the early 1990s he met people who made prop replicas and took his homemade cosplay up a notch. “I had one of the first screen-accurate Vader costumes made around 1996. I went to the L.A. Children's Hospital one Halloween to hand out candy and met many of the early members of **the 501st Legion** and that's when I



Baxter's Sandor Clegane cosplay is exceptional. (Select to view)

first joined.”

Also known as Vader's Fist, the 501st Legion is a volunteer organization full of costume enthusiasts promoting interest in *Star Wars* via events and charity work. They're well known for staying in character, although there are times where that rule is relaxed.

“It's important in cosplay not to break character if at all possible, but I will do it if I upset a child in order to make them feel safe. You don't ever want to scare little kids,” he says.

Being so involved with cosplay has seen Baxter reshape elements of his life to accommodate the hobby. “I guess about ten years ago I did start to organize all my vacations around conventions,” he says. “My wife was not pleased at first but she has been a great sport since then.”

Baxter also appeared as an actor portraying Vader in Super Power Beat Down's *Batman Vs Darth Vader* and *Darth Vader Vs Gandalf*; while portraying The Hound in *If Game of Thrones Characters Lived Among Us*.

“Videos like those were all so much fun to do. It's still hard to comprehend that millions of people have seen me play those roles—sort of, since I'm usually in a mask or make-up. I really do love to act but never felt the need to try to do it as a career. I'm always up for doing these kinds of videos as long as I can find the time. With my current job as a film executive at Legion M it has become more

difficult.”

Baxter says it’s best to have a relaxed attitude to cosplay and there’s no need to choose between being wholly accurate or creating ‘out of the box’ ideas. “I like to do both,” he says, having created a Darth Hound mash-up which saw Vader wearing the Hound’s helmet. “I feel being accurate is important but at the same time I love doing mash-ups because they are so imaginative. When people recognize what you are doing you feel an instant kinship with them since they ‘get’ the joke.”

When *Dragon+* asks about the best D&D cosplay he’s ever seen, his quick reply is: “Probably **Trent Oster’s Minsc** at the Stream of Many Eyes.” Which is appropriate for so many reasons...

David Baxter is a film executive at Legion M . You can follow him on Facebook , Instagram and Twitter .



“I’m a total noob at cosplay,” says Trent Oster, the CEO of Beamdog, although thankfully that didn’t stop him appearing as the character of Minsc from the *Baldur’s Gate* video game at the Stream of Many Eyes. His initial choices were either Minsc or the half-orc blackguard, Dorn Il-Khan. “I was less likely to die of heat stroke as Minsc,” says Oster of his final decision.

Originally Oster set out to construct a set of armor himself, turning to his friend **Lewis Mayhem**—fashion designer and leatherworker extraordinaire—for advice. “I told her what I had in mind and asked

her where to get good leather,” he says. “She looked at me and said, ‘The first thing you did, coming to talk to me, was right. The second thing is wrong—you should just ask me if I could build it for you.’”

Oster had Lewis craft the armor, which she did within two weeks. “She went to work, furiously putting together not only my costume but also the outfits for Rasaad the sun soul monk and Biff the understudy,” reveals Oster, adding that Minsc’s leather scale armor weighed around 40lbs. “It takes a while to get on and off, so bathroom breaks and staying out of the sun are something you keep in mind.”



(Select to view)

Minsc’s trademark bald head required a skull cap designed by **Gabby Grave** and Rasaad’s tattoos were created by **Red Dodge**, both of which were applied on location. “Getting ready was two hours of make-up for the bald cap, which was totally worth it as almost everyone was convinced I had shaved my head,” said Oster.

“I was constantly asked to be in pictures and faces lit up when they saw my character,” says Oster on the reactions to his cosplay. “People recognized the character and asked ‘Where’s Boo?’ ‘Boo is right here!’ I always replied in a low booming voice, pointing at the hamster poised on my shoulder.”

The Stream of Many Eyes included a number of highlights for Oster, including **Holly Conrad**’s appearance as the **Lady of Pain**, which he describes as the best D&D cosplay he’s seen. There was also an eventful trip to a famous tavern.

“I was sitting at a table in the Yawning portal with Rasaad [Phil Daigle], Elminster [Ed Greenwood], Mirt the Moneylender [Chris Lindsey] and Alveus Malcanter [Mark Meer]. Fans would come by and they would recognize one of our party and start chatting with us. But the look on their faces when we introduced them to Ed was priceless.”

One thing Oster’s cosplays won’t lack in the future are weapons,

given that he built axes and swords as a teenager, even though he admits he lacked the understanding of the tools and the steels he should have been using. “My father was a welder in his youth so I grew up with the equipment to do some metalworking,” he explains. “I started weaponsmithing three years ago and did some research on steel and knife making tools.”

He then built his own forge, a belt grinder and a forging press. “I’m proud of the tools as much as I am the final product. I’m mostly self-taught, with two days working with a local blacksmith to help me polish up my hammer work.”

So far the largest items he’s forged are an elvish dagger and a cavalry sabre, but he’s not stopping there. “Anything I make would be banned from any convention as I forge high carbon Damascus steel. I think the future holds something bigger. When I make something I really like I’m certain it will appear in some form.”

Trent Oster is the CEO of video games company [Beamdog](#) . You can follow him on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) .



“My job *rocks!*” says performance and motion capture artist T.J. Storm when we ask him what it’s like to don costumes without getting dressed up in that costume. “Not only do I get to bring incredible, often iconic, characters to life, I get to share this type of acting by teaching it at my school in Los Angeles.”

Storm has been involved with motion capture technology since its early days, after the guy sitting next to him at a directing class asked T.J. if he wanted to help try out some new tech. “He called it

‘mocap’. That was over 20 years ago,” T.J. says. “Since then I’ve been fortunate enough to be a part of so many wonderful video games, movies, TV shows, and now VR as well!”

Storm has used performance capture to play Colossus in *Deadpool*, Godzilla in the 2014 blockbuster movie, and describes playing title character *Knack* for the PlayStation 4 game as one of his most challenging and fun roles. “Most recently I’ve gotten play the biggest, meanest yautja [Predator] to date in Shane Black’s *The Predator*! I performance captured the evolved Predator that hunts... well, everything.”



Storm’s motion-capture work includes Hollywood blockbusters (Select to view)

As a Dungeon Master for a number of games, Storm understands the similarity between his day job as an actor and his ability to bring the world of D&D to life. “If you *love* this genre you not only step into a role, you make it your own,” he explains. “That’s what you have to do if you are a good DM. If you don’t believe it why should your players? If as a DM you can’t see the face of the barkeep talking to your rogue character, know what he’s thinking, know what motivates him, then you don’t get as deep an experience and neither do your players. But if you are fully immersed in your world and in your characters’ heads, you weave a story and an experience that pulls everyone at your table into this incredible shared storytelling tapestry. For me, that is what makes D&D absolutely magical.”

Being a big fan of Dungeons & Dragons (he also played in **Mike Mearls’ game** at the inaugural Founders & Legends Day event), it’s comforting to know that the man who traditionally dresses in a suit covered in dots has previously brought a D&D cosplay to life. Storm was one of those in the chair during the season eleven

finale of the TV show *Face-Off*, with make-up artist and D&D player **Cig Neutron** going to work on him.

“He had to make us up into martial art beast warriors representing the different styles of kung fu, and I was the dragon,”

T.J. recalls. “Cig worked his genius, and after five or six hours in the make-up chair Dragon came to life. I was thinking to myself ‘I want to go home and DM the game dressed like this right now. Tonight they meet the dragonkin son of Tiamat!’ Needless to say, they wouldn’t let me drive home like that.”

Things have moved on a pace for Storm since Halloween 2017. “Last year I went out for Halloween dressed as the Predator,” he tells *Dragon+*. “I cobbled together the mask, the shoulder cannon, some monster hands, clothes, and monster feet. It was okay, not award-winning but fun. This year, I *am* the Predator.”

T.J. Storm is the instructor at [The Mind’s Eye Tribe: The Action Actor’s Academy](#) and a performance and motion capture artist who has appeared in major movie productions. You can follow him on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) .



Cig Neutron and his Dragon kung-fu creation. (Select to view)



“I directed and produced the *Dungeon Master* stage show for ten years. It involved dressing as various creatures and fantasy characters based on first and second edition D&D once a month,” says Michael T. Coleman, talking about the interactive stage show that riffs off the adventure of live action roleplay.

Given his role in the show, it’s not surprising to learn that his favorite D&D character to cosplay was the Dungeon Master himself. “You name it, I’ve probably dressed as it.”

Coleman describes himself as a huge Halloween nut when he was a kid, putting considerable effort into his costumes... with a little help from his mom. “My mother would sew my costumes, such as an Admiral Kirk uniform or an elf ranger outfit,” he says. “The first time I remember putting effort into creating an accurate costume of an established character was when I dressed as Deckard from *Blade Runner*. I offered to hand out quarters to anyone who could guess my costume because there were just not enough geeks around.” He also hasn’t forgotten his mother’s good work and is happy to reveal that she still helps



Coleman has been mistaken for the Game of Thrones actor!

him out with his costumes: “She’s the one who made my current Littlefinger cloak.”

Nifty skills, as Coleman says his cosplay of Littlefinger from *Game of Thrones* also happens to be the one that gets the best reactions. “It’s mostly people going, ‘Oh my God! I totally thought you were the guy!’ The first time I did it, people would saunter up beside me and say, ‘I don’t like you’. Or run by shouting, ‘You’re a bad man!’”

A cosplay guest at the Stream of Many Eyes (“I guess I am considered a professional cosplayer, as that was what they listed me as [on the site](#). So, now it’s official,” he says with a grin), he picks out [Dallas Bloom](#)’s half-orc butcher as one of the best D&D cosplays he’s ever seen.

“The other performers and cosplayers were creative, positive, and fun people. We spent our ample downtime over those three days entertaining ourselves by attempting to put together an adventuring party or creating our own slash fiction in-character, complete with [bardic song](#). By the time we interacted with the guests, we all knew each other so well we could riff off one another and felt like it was our city. Plus they had Dancakes.”

With a background in acting and improv, Coleman finds it easy to act in character when cosplaying. “When I appear as Littlefinger I often have people jump a bit when I speak because they don’t expect the voice. I can’t stop talking like that for a day or two afterwards. Same with any of our tabletop games, which can be confusing if I’m doing too many of them in a week.”

You can also find him playing Doctor Strange and Doctor Doom on Truly Indie Studios’ [Heroes with Issues](#) . “I used to train with [Tatiana Dekhtyar](#) at karate and one day she said they wanted me to send in a video audition for Dr. Strange,” says Coleman of his involvement. “They insisted it be British, which I made fun of in the audition since Strange is from New York. It’s filmed at Brian Suskind’s house [he plays Dr. Roger Huntoon] and Brian has a secret game room through that bookshelf behind his couch. It’s the room we used in the Doctor Doom episode, with mounted heads of mind flayers.”

You can find details of Michael T. Coleman’s shows [Tales of the Extraordinary and Adventure!](#) [on his website](#) and follow him on

Facebook and Instagram .



“Is it wrong to say Black Viper?” says model and cosplayer Vivid Vivka when she reveals the D&D character she most likes to cosplay. “She now holds a very firm place in my heart and putting her costume on makes the character so much more *real*. It’s a fantastic way to really help me embody her. Aside from Viper I love dressing up as Ghost, my character from *Sirens of the Realms*, who will always be tip top fun. It just helps put you into the role.”

Vivka has also kitted Black Viper out with additional extras, noting that it’s alright to add your own spin on the characters you cosplay: “I was very thankful to the folks at D&D who gave me the option to adjust the character. I was very proud of her Viper fangs, and obsessed over what materials a woman of nobility would choose” [eventually choosing a Damascus blade and black horn handles].

“Whereas I wouldn’t say it’s the *most* important for me to be allowed to change a character, I feel it adds a special element to it that makes that costume feel more mine. Even if it’s weathering a cape or adding some extra straps for stability. I love really adding to a character to make the 2D work in a 3D world.”

“I learn a new skill or tactics or tricks with every costume I build



Vivka loved making the accessories work in the real-world. (Select to view)

—that is most of the fun! Not all my experiments work out. But you have to push yourself out of your comfort zone and try new materials and new techniques.

And there is *nothing* wrong with purchasing items or even full costumes! Lots of cosplayers take commissions, and putting money into their craft just shows appreciation for their art.”

“It’s so heart-warming to hear compliments on something that you’ve worked so hard and for so long on,” says Vivka on the reactions to her cosplays. “The best reaction is always when someone’s eyes light up and they run over, and we both just geek out about the character. I dress up to showcase my fandom and it’s fantastic to be able to share that love of something with someone else. Wearing a costume is like wearing a big neon sign that says ‘I love this thing!’ and it’s a great conversation starter with others who also love that thing.”

While she loves creating established characters, Vivka’s passion for cosplay is at its peak when working on original character designs. “Being able to make something and never have it be *wrong* is very freeing. That’s what I love so much about making my wasteland or post-apocalyptic outfits, as well as my LARP outfits. I get to make the decisions on color, fit, texture, style... what elements, trinkets, do-dads, and dangles I add. It’s very therapeutic and gets me so excited for costuming all over again.”

As for the best D&D cosplay that she's ever seen, Vivka narrows it down to two. " [Dani Hartel](#)'s [Scrummy](#) was amazing to see in person. It's like she is alive with mushrooms and moss! And [Holly Conrad](#)'s trash witch, Strix, is also next level. My favorite aspect is that she learned how to make a hat for it and then made holes in it so she could put the hat over her horns. It's darling."

We first featured Vivka's Black Viper costume [in issue 21](#) and she has since created this video from her photoshoot with [Toxic Love Photography](#). Enjoy!

You can connect with Vivid Vivka on [Facebook](#) , [Instagram](#) , [Twitter](#) , [Twitch](#) and help support her projects on [Patreon](#) .

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Memento Mori

If the dungeons don't get you, the dragons will! Members of the extended D&D family share the pain of a major character death.

We're sorry for your loss. We really are. But *Dragon+* couldn't help using all hallowed evils, when it's easier to peek behind the curtain that separates life and death, to (solemnly) celebrate the demise of some important characters.

These traumatic tales of loss are the stuff bards live to capture, so we hope they'll be gentle, respectful and just a little bit bawdy as they recount these acts of daring do. Some of us are still nursing the wounds...



Binwin Bronzebottom (Scott Kurtz)

“Binwin Bronzebottom, mountain dwarf fighter/barbarian, started his career as an intern for Acquisitions Incorporated, joining them on many adventures through the Forgotten Realms. Two years ago he retired from AI to find fame and fortune for himself and start his own adventuring group—which has so far had mixed results. You can

read all about it **every Friday**.

“I have played Binwin during live events, podcasts, and streams over the course of the last eleven years. I have never played Binwin in a private game with close friends. He’s always been a character of the people, for the people.

“Binwin died during **episode 105 of *Dice, Camera, Action*** . The Xanathar had captured Evelyn, and Binwin charged in. He threw a Javelin at the beholder and got a critical hit on his attack roll, destroying the Xanathar’s central, magic-dispelling eye. The beholder returned the favor by turning Binwin to stone and disintegrating him.

“Ultimately Binwin’s death was the evil beholder’s fault, although it could be argued it was the dwarf’s ego that killed him in the end. I believe his second-to-last words were, “I’ve fought a beholder before, they’re no big deal.”



The moment Binwin became Bin-was! (Select to view)

“However, I was thrilled when Binwin died for very specific reasons. I’ve played this character for over a decade and I’ve always wanted him to have a glorious death. It’s an important part of a hero’s story. Chris Perkins is the only DM I would want to kill Binwin, so that’s also perfect.

“There has yet to be a resurrection, but Jared’s character Diath did gather ashes and retrieve Binwin’s signature axes. So there is hope.

Thank you for your kindness during this difficult time. Losing a character is always hard, even harder still when it's one you've played for over ten years and based several revenue streams on."

Scott Kurtz is an online comic artist and you can follow him on [Twitter](#) and read [Binwin's Minions](#) online every Friday.

Rolf (Jim Zub)

"When I started playing D&D aged eight, my first character was a dwarven fighter named Rolf. He dreamed of becoming a warlord and leading his own army when he was older and more powerful. Every time I defeated enemies, I'd scrounge their weapons and equipment to add to my stash so I could use it to outfit that army.

"For quite a while my older brother Joe, who was the DM, didn't track encumbrance so I had a long sheet of paper tracking the dozens of swords, spears, daggers, and chainmail shirts in my collection. When Joe realized that collection weighed too much and I shouldn't be able to carry it all, I bought a horse and cart. All Rolf's adventures carried on in a straightforward fashion: I'd go into a dungeon, kill all the creatures, stockpile my treasure and equipment and then move on to the next one. Until the Village of Hommlet...



Jim Zub (Select to view)

"I didn't listen very closely when my brother described the village. I didn't realize it was a human town meant to act as a home base for adventurers. I just thought it was another dungeon, some sort of monster encampment, so I waltzed in and started slaughtering everyone. I went door to door and dropped every living thing I came across.

“My brother, shocked and amused, let me carry on for a half-dozen houses before the militia showed up and tried to kill this deranged dwarf on a murderous rampage. The guards chased me through town until I holed myself up in a random house and barred the door while firing arrows out the windows to try and keep them back. They lit the place on fire, and that was the end of Rolf.

“I went door to door and dropped every living thing I came across”
– Jim Zub

“I was bitter and confused. Then, after Joe explained how it all went so wrong, I was embarrassed and sad.

“Rolf’s legacy carried on thanks to his remarkable identical twin, Rolf II. He never did get that army though...”

Writer, artist, and instructor Jim Zub is the co-author of the *Rick and Morty VS Dungeons & Dragons* comic and you can follow him on [Twitter](#) .



Nook Vald and Cranny (Ryan Verniere)

“There are a lot of cobwebs stretching across thirty years of memory...”

Nook Vald, my beloved character of the past thirty-one years, died at the hands of Dungeon Master Mike Mearls after a mere ten minutes of play when the surly dwarf thief succumbed to the venomous bite of a wolf spider.

“Two nights before Luke Gyax’s Founders & Legends charity event held in Burbank, CA, Mike reached out to ask if my group, The Murder Hobos, would be up for some first edition Dungeons & Dragons to honor Gary Gyax on

what would have been his eightieth birthday. Without hesitation I hammered “YES” on the virtual keys of my cell phone.

“Nook didn’t know it, but he was already dead. The weave of reality was folding in to correct the near impossible success of a character over a quarter of a century old. Some would call it fate. I blame a ghost.



(Select to view)

“It all started back in 1987. I was ten years old and had never played an actual game of D&D. All I had were TSR’s *Endless Quest* books, the Rankin/Bass storybook and record of *The Hobbit*, and a few copies of *Dragon* magazine—but I had never rolled a d20 with purpose. I was but a babe who had yet to enter the woods until a family friend named Don Wagner invited me to play a session of Dungeons & Dragons. What I didn’t know at the time was that Don had agreed to babysit me. From my perspective, I was about to join a bunch of twentysomethings to play D&D. With only a week to prepare, I feverishly set to work.

“Two days passed and I hadn’t come up with anything. I was about to give up when a Thomas English muffins commercial popped up on the television. It featured a young Scott Bakula—the guy soon to star in *Quantum Leap*. A crucial bit of marketing copy penetrated my little brain”...toast up the crunchy nooks and crannies...” and the rest is unimportant.

“Nook didn’t know it, but he was already dead. The weave of reality was folding in to correct the near impossible success of a character over a quarter of a century old”

– Ryan Verniere

“What was a nook or a cranny? I’d ring my grandfather. That guy knew stuff! Calling anyone in 1987 was like breaking into a vault. It involved sliding a wooden stool over to a mounted phone that hung off the wall and turning a rotary glyph seven times to match a numerical sequence. Gramps told me that a nook was a hole or divot in a baked good and a cranny was just a smaller one of the same. So one is tinier than the other.

“I didn’t make one character, I made two. One smaller than the other. That afternoon Nook and his faithful sidekick Cranny, the latter a gnome illusionist/thief, were born. Cranny died that Friday night. While fighting back the tears, I had Nook shove Cranny’s corpse into a burlap sack. The plan was for Nook to find a way to resurrect his friend. Decades passed. Nothing changed. Nook kept trying.

“Cut to thirty years later. There we were gathered in a hotel room, a full blood moon framed in the suite’s windows on Gary Gygax’s birthday. Mike was running *The Temple of Elemental Evil*. Before you laugh, understand that I have never played through *ToEE*. Nook opened the door to the tower alongside the rotting drawbridge and I had him grease the hinges to keep them quiet so I could move inside. Mike gave Nook a surprise turn against the great wolf spider. He struck the creature in its gray-and-black abdomen. Ichor sprayed everywhere. Nook’s short sword pierced the beast’s carapace for thirteen points of damage, but a huge spider has fourteen hit points. It still lived.

“Mike rolled for the spider and the wolf spider bit into Nook’s arm for three points of damage. Okay, not so bad, but Mike winced and asked me to save versus poison. Nook’s a dwarf! They save versus poison! That’s what dwarves do!

” *Clack*. The d20 showed a two. Even with Nook’s racial bonuses it was over.

There was a flood of emotions but I was happy Nook finally died and it was at the hands of D&D’s creative director, under a full moon, on Gary Gygax’s birthday!

“They dragged the corpse back to Hommlet and resurrected Nook but not before stitching a bugbear’s face over his own. What can I say? We like surprises.”

Ryan Verniere is the Supervising Writer: Creative Development at Riot Games and you can follow him [on Twitter](#) .

Jelenneth Siannodel (Kelly Lynne D’Angelo)

“Even though it wasn’t a super long campaign, which saved some of the hurt, I have had a character die, and it was pretty painful. My steadfast ranger Jelenneth Siannodel lasted a total of three sessions. Not long enough.

“Jelenneth somehow accidentally ended up in a very high-level tournament for labyrinth gladiators and died trying to save a reckless fellow player. So noble. The loud armor of this careless fighter gave us away while we trying to hide, so she told everyone to run and held down the front line. She was impaled by a minotaur’s horn, paying the ultimate price.



“What was upsetting was I put tons of work into her backstory during character creation and suddenly *poof* she was gone. At least this is how she would’ve liked to go.

“She was brought back briefly thanks to a very powerful potion the party got their hands on. However, she was never quite the same after that.”

Musical and animation writer Kelly Lynne D’Angelo is the DM of Girls Guts Glory and you can follow her [on Twitter](#) .

Otis (Luke Gygax)

“I grew up playing a lot of games, which is no surprise given my dad. I would come home from school and sit in his study while he typed away on the project he was working on at the moment. I’d get the pages hot off his typewriter and sit in the overstuffed leather chair reading.

“One day after school I asked him to play D&D but he said no so I kept pestering him until he finally said, ‘OK, I’ve got an adventure for you’. He took my sister Heidi and me—playing Murfles and Otis—on an adventure to locate the ancient tomb of a powerful mage in the mountains. I don’t know if he was in a bad mood but we delved into *Tomb of Horrors* that night.

“I was playing my main character at that time, a 10th-level ranger named Otis. He’d started off in the *Village of Hommlet* and had gone through the *Giants* series and against the *dragon*, playtesting a ton of modules. I was probably four or five when I first started playing him, and was probably nine or ten years old by the time we played that evening.

“It was a sad end and I was still pretty young. My sister made fun of me when I got a little misty-eyed at the potential end of my hero”

– Luke Gygax

“I enjoyed the wonderful descriptions and drawings throughout the adventure. But the *Tomb of Horrors* is really difficult and there are many, many dangers that threaten even a Ranger Lord. Sadly, I ended up going through one of the tunnels and all of my equipment was transported to the end of the dungeon. Naked, I found my way into a small ten-by-ten room with three levers on the wall. I was manipulating those with much trepidation because levers are never good in my father’s dungeons.

“I gambled and pushed all three levers upwards, opening a 100-foot pit below me. I dropped and we rolled all the damage, and I was severely wounded. I had about 107 hit points as a 10th-level ranger—which was a lot—and I was alive. But I was trapped and naked at the

bottom of a deep pit. A very ignoble end to a mighty hero who had foiled King Snurre and stopped the vile drow's machinations.

“It was a sad end and I was still pretty young. My sister made fun of me when I got a little misty-eyed at the certain end of Otis, the first character I ever played. But Otis was a hero and had aided Mordenkainen more than once, so my dad said, ‘After a week goes by and you haven’t come back Mordenkainen scries for you and identifies exactly where you’re at and comes and rescues you.’

“Of course I never played Otis after that so that was the end of adventuring for my poor ranger, even though my dad softened the blow. The silver lining to this story is that the loss of Otis caused me to roll up my next character, Melf, who is my all-time favorite character.

Luke Gygax is the Founder and CEO of the Gary Con Gaming Convention, which takes place from 7-10 March 2019 at Lake Geneva, WI.

Bodkin Brewmaster (Matt Chapman)

“You have to understand, I always played thieves. Always. When I first started playing D&D there were so many things they could do (pick locks and pockets, climb walls) that I wondered why anyone would choose to play any other non-magical class.

“When I eventually broke my roguish mold, it was to play a wizard in quite a diverse party, which included a gnome, a dwarf, a goblin, a halfling, several humans, and two kinds of elves: a high elf and a drow. It was that last pairing which caused all the trouble.



“When a full-on fight broke out between this pair in the middle of a temple we were exploring, I and other party members jumped in to break it up. But the differences were irreconcilable. The solution? One side of the party went with the drow and continued plundering

elsewhere in the temple, while we went to the lower levels to do the same. At first everything seemed like it would work out. Then we smelled the smoke.

“To cut a long story short, we eventually ran for our lives, soot filling our lungs as fire crisped our skin. Only a few of us even made it to the door and what was waiting for us wasn’t salvation, it was the swords and spears of our former party members who had set the fire. Bodkin died at the hands of people he had previously called friends.

“There’ve been a few characters who’ve joined the file of the dead since those days. But Bodkin’s demise still hurts the most”

– Matt Chapman

I’d never had a character die before and this seemed like a particularly harsh way for one to go. It naturally caused a huge argument among our group of players. Yet what I couldn’t help thinking was that my usual thief-type character would have probably gone with the drow and been the butcher rather than the sheep. Or he’d have been with the high elf but been too savvy to fall for something so vicious.

“It sounds odd now but that experience taught me a lot. For starters, I had to fight my urge to go back to playing thieves or to only roll-up characters on the murkier side of the alignment. I had to be the better man. But I also realized that not everyone is on your side and it’s always important to challenge people’s actions and wonder at what agenda they might privately be pursuing. It taught me street smarts I’d otherwise never have picked up.

“There’ve been a few characters who’ve joined the file of the dead since those days. But Bodkin’s demise still hurts the most. I’ve recently been thinking of reviving him for a new game, giving him the more unusual entrance scene of waking up on a cleric’s altar. He might have a few trust issues, but what more powerful and genuinely painful backstory could any character ever have?”

Matt Chapman is Editor-in-Chief of *Dragon+* and you can follow him on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#) .

The Realm's Great and Good (Ed Greenwood)

“As the father of the Realms, I often feel like its Head Undertaker, too. There I am recording *another* death. And another. And another.

“The problem is the Realms is published so everybody already knows about my major character deaths: Azoun; Manshoon (many times); Elminster and Szass Tam (several times each); spoilers such as Delg in the *Shandril* series; and a far more major character in that trilogy, Lady Narantha Crownsilver, in *Swords of Eveningstar*; all those Lords of Waterdeep in death masks; the body count of the magically mighty in *Spellstorm*; and of Cormyrean nobles and others in *Death of the Dragon* and the *Sage of Shadowdale* trilogy...



“The Realms is a very big place and people of all races live and—of course—inevitably die. A lot. Many of them onstage, for dramatic effect.

“I tell you, it makes you want to go out and create worlds, to feel happy!”

Author Ed Greenwood is the creator of the Forgotten Realms and you can follow him on [Twitter](#).

Faraday (Bruce R. Cordell)

“I had a character die not too long ago, relatively speaking. It was a sad day, I tell you! My character Faraday, an intelligent seeker who specializes in science, died during a Cypher System sci-fi game. He

suffered a fatal finale after a long fall to the surface of a harsh alien planet.

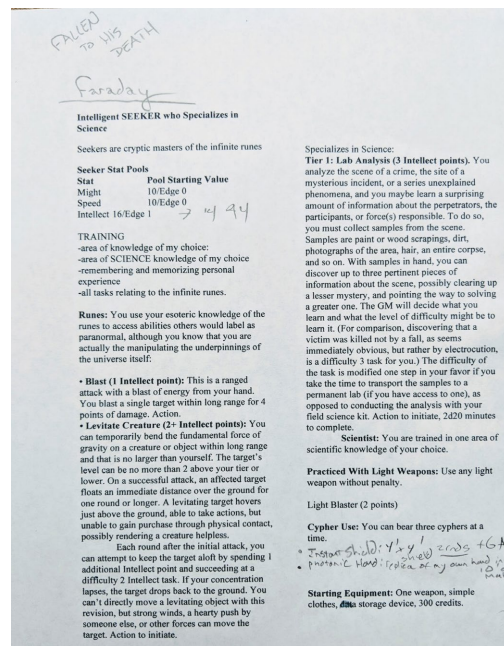
“I’d played him for several months, during which time he investigated the mysteries of the universe. When the fatal event occurred, our spacecraft was boarded by warrior monks who had been mentally enslaved by aliens with impressive psychic powers. Faraday was fighting them off in the spacecraft’s hold as we broke for orbit.

“The spacecraft engineer, in a bid to save the ship, opened the hold cargo doors and flipped the ship upside down as we accelerated for space. This bold maneuver emptied the craft of warrior monks, who all fell miles to their deaths. Umm, remember who else was in the hold? Yeah...

“That engineer was played by Erik Scott De Bie, so really and directly it was his fault. Still, the main emotion I felt when Faraday died was surprise and perhaps a little admiration at Erik’s audacity.

“There was no later resurrection for Faraday, until now, in this retelling of my scientist’s end. I dug up his character sheet and pulled him out of the dead character file. Thanks for the opportunity to say a final goodbye.”

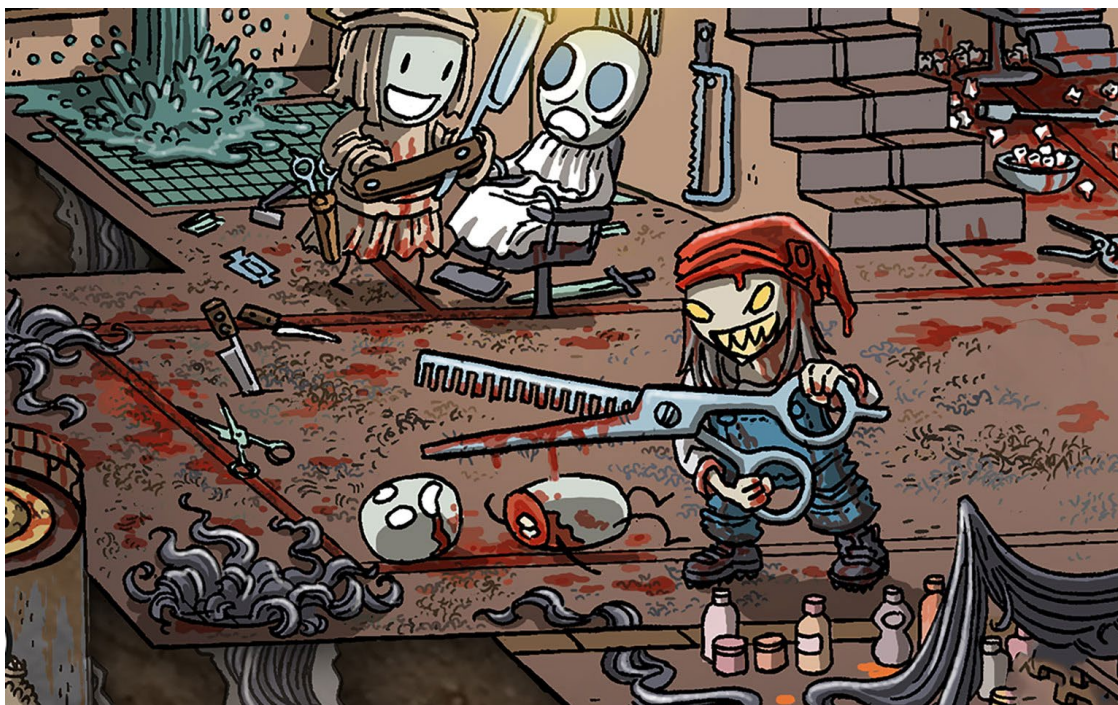
You can find author Bruce R. Cordell’s latest works on his [official website](#).



Faraday’s sheet has been marked “Fallen to his death”. (Select to view)



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Comic: Yugoloths

Jason Thompson provides some holiday treats, plus other cartoony goodness!

TREASURES OF THE YUGOLOTHS

Neither demons nor devils—back in *Dragon+ 20* Jason Thompson took a [look at the yugoloths](#) from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*! As an added bonus Jason crafted the following yugoloth-themed magic items you might use to reward your players:

As they travel throughout the cosmos to perform evil deeds, the mercenary yugoloths are routinely paid in gold, souls, and magic from every plane of existence. Some of the more precious magic items to have been commissioned for the yugoloths as payment for services rendered have subsequently been scattered to other realms, still tainted by the evil of their former masters.

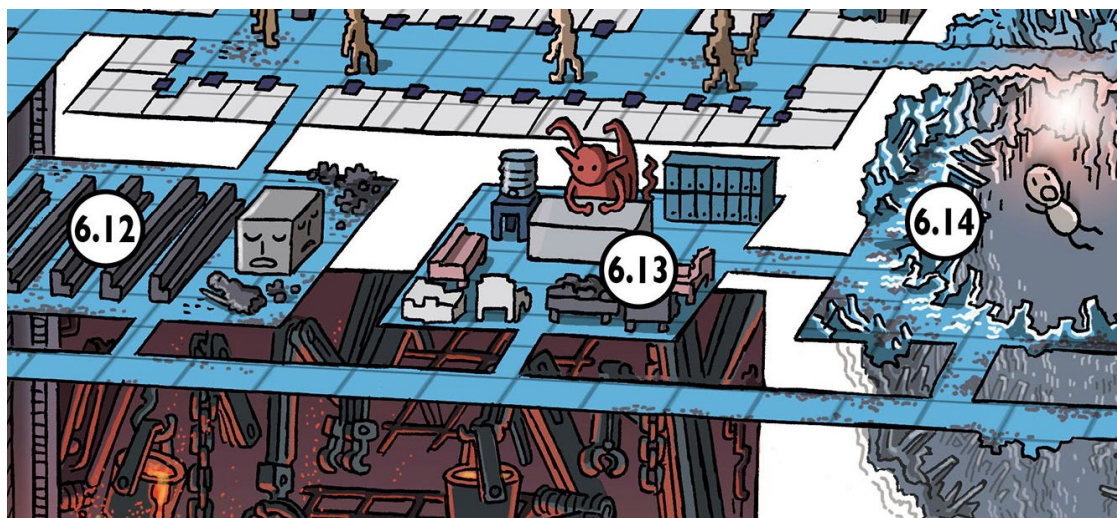
[Download PDF](#)

PAST ADVENTURES

Looking for some truly wild adventure material? Don't forget about Jason's past scenarios, created especially for *Dragon+*!

Barber of Silvermoon: From *Dragon+* 12, this adventure (for characters level 4-6) brings together new creatures from *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. People have been disappearing at night in the town of Silvermoon. Some vanish entirely, with whispers that fiends or other evil creatures have spirited them away. Others return strangely altered, with their memories of the event wiped, and their minds dulled... and always with incredible haircuts. The pattern of vanishings leads the adventurers to a barbershop on the edge of town.

[Download PDF](#)



Six Faces of Death: More recently from *Dragon+* 21 (for characters level 11-13) an alien being, dark omens and vanishing ships send the adventurers to a mysterious island newly appeared in the Sea of Swords. Can they uncover the mysteries of Changing Island and save Faerûn from a terror from another plane?

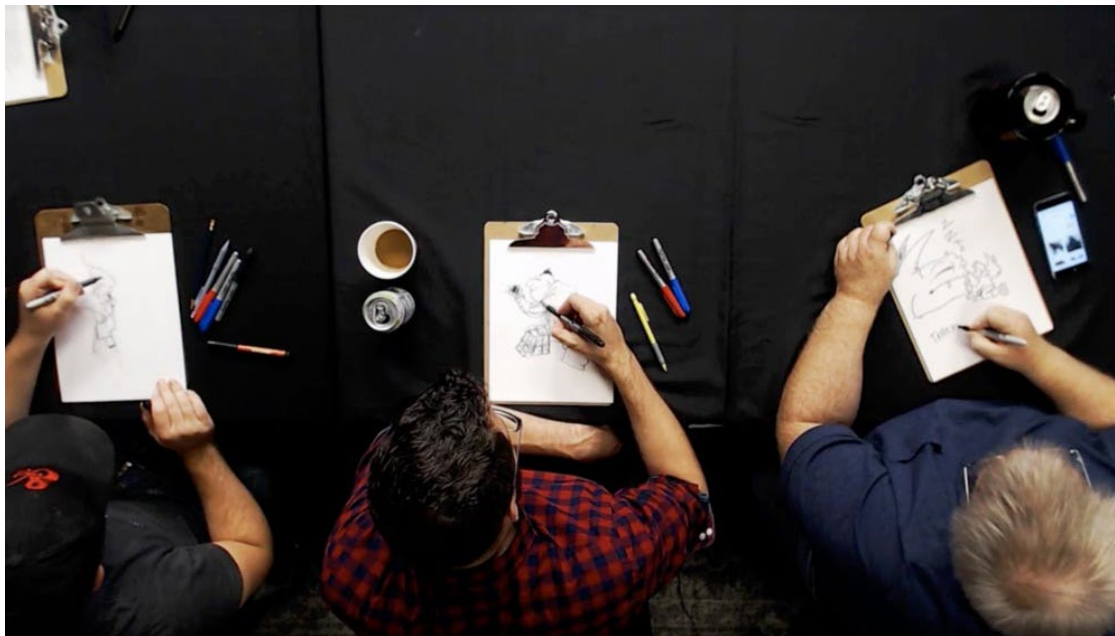
[Download PDF](#)

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Comic artist, author and illustrator Jason Thompson currently runs a Monday night gaming group in San Francisco. His works include the Eisner-nominated *Manga: The Complete Guide*, *King of RPGs*, *H.P.*

Lovecraft's The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath, and the tabletop game *Mangaka: The Fast & Furious Game of Drawing Comics*. His favorite things to draw are landscapes, plants, reptiles and amphibians.

DUNGEONS & DOODLES



[Watch on Twitch](#)

Our latest Dungeons & Doodles episode has now aired! Stan!, Shawn Wood, and returning guest Tyler Jacobson joined the *Dragon+* livestream. The topics we asked them to draw?

- **PARTS IS PARTS:** Spellcasters use all kinds of weird stuff as components for their spells. Draw a spellcaster out gathering an extremely bizarre component.
- **HEADS WILL FLY:** A vargouille has a body like a severed human head with bat-like wings in place of ears. A penanggalan is a vampire that can detach its head and send it flying around with entrails hanging from its neck. Draw a new monster to join the “flying severed head” squad.
- **NOBODY LIKES ME, EVERYBODY HATES ME:** A spawn of Kyuss is usually a zombie filled with worms. If Kyuss was on a recruitment drive for followers, what else might he use to fill his spawn?”
- **INFINITE ELEMENTS IN RIDICULOUS**

COMBINATIONS: The multiverse is a big place filled with parallel elemental planes more strange and exotic than most adventurers can imagine. Summoners and artificers are always experimenting with new materials from which to construct their creatures. Make a drawing of an elemental or a golem made of some new material.

And, their finished pieces—enjoy!

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TREASURES OF THE YUGOLOTHS

BY JASON THOMPSON

As they travel throughout the cosmos to perform evil deeds, the mercenary yugoloths are routinely paid in gold, souls, and magic from every plane of existence. Some of the more precious magic items to have been commissioned for the yugoloths as payment for services rendered have subsequently been scattered to other realms, still tainted by the evil of their former masters.

These yugoloth-themed magic items can be used by the DM as special treasures, or as plot hooks for a campaign built around the Lower Planes. Three of these items—the *amulet of the Styx*, the *censer of blood*, and the *merrenoloth's oar* first appeared in the adventure *Six Faces of Death*, in *Dragon+* 21.

AMULET OF THE STYX

Wondrous item, rare

This amulet of smoked glass on a platinum chain contains a small amount of water from the River Styx, making it resemble a round black gem unless closely inspected.

When you sleep or trance, you dream the lost memories of a random creature that has died, giving you some of that creature's skills and insights. At the end of a long rest taken while you wear the *amulet of the Styx*, you gain proficiency in one skill or with one tool of your choice. You cannot already have proficiency with the skill or tool. You lose this temporary proficiency at the end of your next long rest.

CENSER OF BLOOD

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This brass incense burner hangs on a brass chain, and is covered with fiendish symbols and the names of ancient vampires. While the censer is on your person, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track by scent and Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect smells. In addition, you are aware of the exact location of any creature within 60 feet of you that is below its hit point maximum.

As an action, you can spill one drop or more of your own blood into the censer, causing it to steam. You suffer one level of exhaustion, and the censer issues forth 1d6 vampiric mists that appear within 10 feet of you. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the vampiric mist.) You can repeat this process to create multiple mists, taking yourself to a maximum

of five levels of exhaustion. The vampiric mists don't appear if you are in sunlight.

The summoned vampiric mists understand your language and obey your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, they attack all nearby humanoids



except yourself, only sparing those that you specifically command them to.

You reduce levels of exhaustion imposed by the *censer of blood* in the normal fashion. Each mist lasts until it is destroyed, until you die, or until you dismiss it as a bonus action.

DERGOLOTH'S BELT

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

While you wear this belt, your head, torso and waist can rotate independently from one another. In addition to being potentially disturbing to onlookers, this gives you the following benefits:

- Your Dexterity score increases by 2, to a maximum of 20.
- You have advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks.

MERRENOLOTH'S OAR

Weapon, very rare (requires attunement)

Made of special wood that grows only in the Lower Planes, this long oar is carved with ancient symbols of death from countless cultures.

While you hold the oar, you have advantage on Dexterity checks to maintain your balance while on a watercraft. In addition, as a bonus action while you hold the oar, you can learn the depth of any water or liquid within sight, and the distance and direction to the closest land while you are on open water.

The *merrenloth's oar* can be used as a weapon. It is treated as a *+1 lance* when so wielded, and it can be used one-handed while you are on board any watercraft.

OCTAVO OF KEEPING

Wondrous item, legendary

In the arcanaloths' endless quest for knowledge and power, no magic item is as highly sought after as the *Books of Keeping*, in which the true names of all yugoloths are scribed. Over eons of research, a few arcanaloths have managed to record the true names of some of their weaker kin in smaller tomes, creating tiny versions of the *Books of Keeping* for their own purposes.

Each *octavo of keeping* contains the names of $1d4 + 1$ yugoloths, as well as ritual instructions for summoning them written in a complex code combining Infernal and Abyssal. These special instructions are unique to each yugoloth. For each name in an *octavo*, roll a d6 to determine what kind of yugoloth it is:

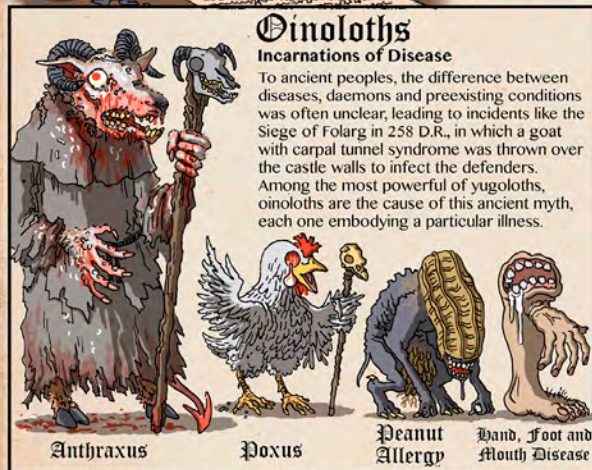
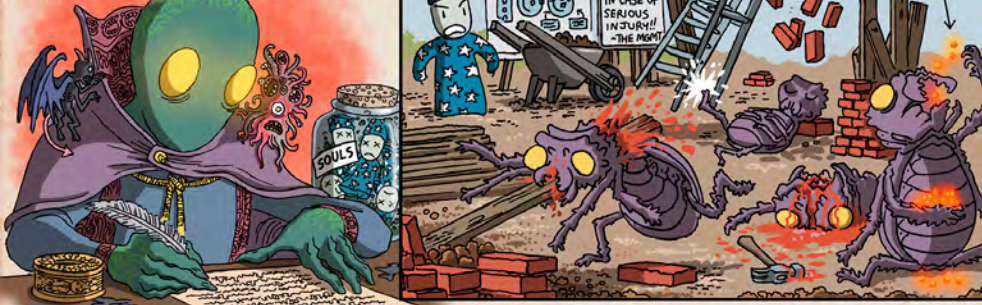
d6 Yugoloth

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1 | Mezzoloth |
| 2 | Nycaloth |
| 3 | Dhergoloth* |
| 4 | Canoloth* |
| 5 | Hydroloth* |
| 6 | Yagnoloth* |

*See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*

A creature that can read both Infernal and Abyssal must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to decode each ritual in the *octavo of keeping*. Any creature that decodes a ritual can use the *octavo* thereafter to summon the yugoloth named by the ritual. This requires 1 hour, rare incense and alchemical powders worth 5,000 gp, and the blood sacrifice of a creature of at least Medium size. When the ritual is completed, the yugoloth appears from the Lower Planes and the summoner must make an Intelligence (Arcana) check contested by the yugoloth's Intelligence check. If the sacrificed creature was a humanoid of Intelligence 4 or greater, the summoner has advantage on the check.

Neither demon nor devil, a yugoloth's only conflicting drives are between evil and more evil. Though used as cheap labor by mages who know their True Names, they invariably find loopholes in their contracts, and act with selfish abandon knowing they will respawn in Gehenna upon 'death'.



Oinoloths

Incarnations of Disease

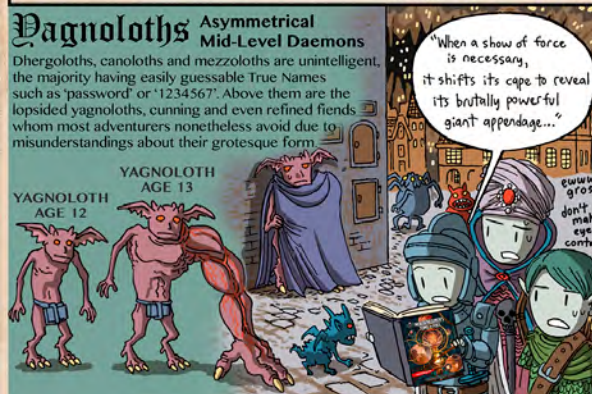
To ancient peoples, the difference between diseases, daemons and preexisting conditions was often unclear, leading to incidents like the Siege of Folarg in 258 D.R., in which a goat with carpal tunnel syndrome was thrown over the castle walls to infect the defenders. Among the most powerful of yugoloths, oinoloths are the cause of this ancient myth, each one embodying a particular illness.



Merrenoloths

Navigators of the River Styx

Also known as Charonadaemons, Merrenoloths are the least vicious of yugoloths, living only for the toxic Styx-spray on their faces, the sound of souls crashing against the rocks, and the burble of hydroloths devouring their prey. Blasphemous, forbidden ferry schedules show how to summon them to pilot skiffs, junks, dinghies, coracles, galleys, knarrs and even undead dragon turtles. Information is gladly given but safety requires avoiding unnecessary conversation.



- When you are prone, standing up costs you only 5 feet of your movement.
- Enemies that gain advantage or other benefits when one or more of their allies are within 5 feet of you gain those benefits only when two or more of their allies are within 5 feet of you.

If the yugoloth wins the opposed check, the ritual was performed improperly and the fiend is free to act as it wishes. This typically involves attempting to kill the summoner and destroy the octavo (see below). If the summoner wins or ties the check, the yugoloth cannot attack or cast spells on the summoner (though any other creatures in the area are fair game) and is bound to obey the summoner for 24 hours. However, the yugoloth always bends and misinterprets the summoner's commands if it can, and the DM might call for Charisma checks to threaten, coax, or trick the yugoloth into doing exactly what the summoner wants. After 24 hours, the yugoloth vanishes back to Gehenna.

If an *octavo of keeping* is used multiple times, the same yugoloths are summoned again and again, even if they were previously destroyed. This greatly annoys the affected yugoloths, which constantly scheme for revenge. If a summoned yugoloth can get its hands on the octavo, it can tear the book in half as an action, destroying it and summoning all the yugoloths whose names are written in the book. Those fiends appear at the start of the yugoloth's next turn, work together to kill the summoner and its allies, then go on a rampage of murder and destruction before returning to Gehenna 24 hours later.

TOL-KENDAR

Weapon (pike), very rare

The *tol-kendar* ("body wrecker" in Infernal) is a magic weapon that grants a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. Wielded by the asymmetrical yagnoloths, it takes the form of a 10-foot-long steel pike topped by a metal cup ringed with blades, with a harpoon point emerging from the cup's center. The *tol-kendar* has the statistics of a pike, but each time you hit, you can choose to do either piercing damage with the harpoon or slashing damage with the blades.

When you roll a 20 on an attack roll made with the *tol-kendar*, the weapon pierces deep into the target's body to deal an extra 2d8 piercing damage. A target that isn't a construct or undead must then succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of your next turn.

ULTROLOTH'S EYE

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

Resembling a large, pale fire opal, this gem is actually a magically preserved eye from an ultroloth—one of the yugoloths' secretive lords.

When you hold the *ultroloth's eye* up to one of your own eyes and look through it, you feel terrible pain, and you take 1d6 poison damage and 1d6 acid damage at the end of each of your turns in which you look through the eye. While looking through the eye, you are color-blind but have truesight out to a range of 120 feet.

Fiendish Insight. You also gain an additional benefit based on which eye you hold the *ultroloth's eye* up to. (If you have more than two eyes, the DM rolls randomly to determine the effect.)

If the *ultroloth's eye* is held to your left eye, you can use a bonus action to look at a creature of Intelligence 4 or greater. While doing so, you learn the name and appearance of the mortal being that creature most loves and respects. If the *ultroloth's eye* is held to your right

eye, you can use a bonus action to look at a creature of Intelligence 4 or greater. While doing so, you learn the thing that creature most fears.

If a creature you look at with either of these features has telepathy, it is aware of what you're doing and can shield itself from your scrutiny with a successful DC 17 Wisdom saving throw.

Permanent Placement. While attuned to the *ultroloth's eye*, you can gouge out your own eye and press the gem into the empty socket. You take 6d6 acid damage and 6d6 poison damage by doing so, but if you survive, the eye grafts itself into your head. A grafted eye gives you the permanent benefit of its features (depending on which eye socket it replaces) and does not deal damage when you use it. It no longer counts against the number of magic items you can attune to, and remains a part of you until you die.

Rumors speak of how a creature that implants one or more *ultroloth's eyes* draws the attention of powerful ultroloths in Gehenna, which might seek out the creature that has stolen the power of their kind.

STAFF OF THE LOWER PLANES

Staff, artifact (requires attunement)

Fiendish lore says that only one other yugoloth was ever powerful enough to challenge the General of Gehenna: an enormous, magically augmented oinoloth named Anthraxus the Decayed, lord of plagues. Anthraxus's fate is lost to time, but its diabolical essence survives, soaked into the wood of the staff it once bore.

The *Staff of the Lower Planes* is made of gray ash seamlessly grafted to a ram's skull, both as hard as iron. It can magically change in size to better conform to the grip of its user.

Dark Attunement. The process of attuning to the staff involves first soaking it in the water of the River Styx. This causes the staff to momentarily animate, whereupon the ram's head bites the nearest creature (+10 to hit, 1d8 piercing damage plus 3d6 necrotic damage). If this damage reduces the creature to 0 hit points, it dies instantly. Otherwise, that creature becomes attuned to the staff and gains instinctive knowledge of its powers.

Magic Quarterstaff. Whether the wielder is attuned or not, the *Staff of the Lower Planes* functions as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. In addition, any creature hit by the staff is affected as if it had been hit by the *contagion* spell (save DC 17).

Any creature that possesses the staff for more than one hour without attuning to it is affected as if it had been hit by the *contagion* spell (save DC 17).

Random Properties. The *Staff of the Lower Planes* has the following random properties:

- 1 minor beneficial property
- 1 major beneficial property
- 1 minor detrimental property
- 1 major detrimental property

Spells. The staff has 8 charges and regains 1d4 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. While holding it, you can use an action and expend 1 or more of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it (save DC 17): *dominate beast* (1 charge), *dominate monster* (3

charges), *dominate person* (1 charge), *geas* (2 charges), *giant insect* (2 charges), *insect plague* (2 charges), *suggestion* (1 charge), or *mass suggestion* (3 charges).

Spells cast from the staff that impose the charmed condition can affect fiends normally immune to that condition.

Styx Master. While you hold the staff, you are immune to the *feblemind* effect of the River Styx (see chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). If you drink from that river, you know the location of all creatures currently on or within its waters, and you can read the memories of any creature whose name you know and which has been subject to the river's *feblemind* effect within the last 24 hours. The dissolved memories are murky and fragmentary, and the DM might call for Intelligence checks to read specific memories.

Master of the Lower Planes. While you are holding the staff, you can use an action to focus and sense the direction to any portals leading to, from, or between the Lower Planes within 1,000 feet of you. You can also sense the specific plane that each such portal leads to.


Punish Fiends. If you reduce a fiend to 0 hit points with a weapon attack made using the staff, that fiend is permanently transformed into a larva when it returns to its home plane. (See the larva statistics block in chapter 2 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.) All intelligent fiends know and fear this power of the staff.

Final Wish. While you are holding the staff, you can cast a *wish* spell as an action. Doing so causes you to lose your attunement to the staff, and you are stricken by a *feblemind* effect as if you had drunk from the River Styx (no saving throw). Only another *wish* or similar effect can cure this affliction. If you use this feature to wish for Anthraxus to be resurrected, your soul goes to Gehenna and your body transforms into a magically augmented oinoloth, becoming the corporeal form of Anthraxus the Decayed.

Undone by Disease. While you are attuned to the staff, you become immune to all disease. However, if the staff ever leaves your side, you immediately suffer from some of the terrible afflictions that the item's power has long held at bay. At the end of each turn when the staff is more than 5 feet away from you, you must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or gain one of the disease effects bestowed by the *contagion* spell. See the *Player's Handbook* and roll a d6 to see which disease infects you.

Once you are suffering from three diseases, you stop gaining new ones. No effect short of a *wish* spell or similar magic can remove or ameliorate these magical diseases until the staff is returned to you.

Destroying the Staff. The *Staff of the Lower Planes* is destroyed if it is submerged for one week in the water of a particular magic stream in Elysium. The name of this stream is recorded in only a few places in the multiverse, including the *Book of Exalted Deeds*.

Each round that the staff is submerged in the stream, larvae and other unintelligent fiends emerge from the wood of the staff and attack any creatures they can see. All yugoloths in the multiverse of Intelligence 18 or higher become aware that the staff is in danger, and they attempt to converge on Elysium to rescue it. 

Design and Illustrations: Jason Bradley Thompson
Editing, Development, and Layout for *Dragon+*:

Scott Fitzgerald Gray

THE BARBER OF SILVERMOON

People have been disappearing at night in the city of Silvermoon. Some vanish entirely, leaving behind whispered rumors of fiends or other evil creatures having spirited them away. Others return strangely altered, with their memories of having been kidnapped wiped clean and their minds strangely dulled—and always with remarkable haircuts.

An adventure for characters of 4th to 6th level



JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON
Adventure Author and Illustrator

Development and Editing: Scott Fitzgerald Gray

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ADVENTURE SETUP

People have been disappearing at night in the city of Silverymoon. Some vanish entirely, leaving behind whispered rumors of fiends or other evil creatures having spirited them away. Others return strangely altered, with their memories of having been kidnapped wiped clean and their minds strangely dulled—and always with remarkable haircuts.

This adventure is designed to showcase some of the new creatures from *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. Except where otherwise indicated, whenever a monster's name appears in bold, it indicates a reference to that book.

Despite its title (a pun on the opera *The Barber of Seville*), this adventure can be set in any settlement of the DM's choice. But beware—this scenario might end with the player characters transformed in strange and permanent ways! Any such transformative effects (including the potent magic of the *Prismatic Coloring Machine*) are the purview of the DM, who is free to modify those effects or make them temporary as desired.

ADVENTURE OVERVIEW

Jooge Nopsmoth, a talented barber, has long lived in Silverymoon with his daughter, Mops. The two have always been happy, even after the death of Jooge's wife, Giselle, a few years ago—except that Jooge has no head for money and an excessive desire to experiment with new barbering techniques. One day, Jooge gave a haircut to a wandering **korred** named Bezoar. That strange fey creature became his regular customer, always coming to Jooge for cuts.

Jooge was able to earn a bit of extra money by selling art objects made from Bezoar's hair cuttings, which the korred's magical nature transformed into the same high-quality steel as Jooge's scissors. Still, it wasn't nearly enough for him to be able to afford the **flail snail** he saw offered for sale from a passing caravan. Jooge suspected correctly that the flail snail's colorful secretions could be used to make brilliant hair dyes, so he borrowed money from **darkling** moneylenders to be able to afford the wondrous creature.

BARBER-SURGEONS

In medieval Europe and the Forgotten Realms alike, barbers do not merely cut hair. They also perform a variety of medical procedures, including dentistry, bloodletting (using leeches), and simple surgeries and battlefield amputations. In real-world Britain, barbers and surgeons were not recognized as separate professions until 1745. The barbershop in this adventure is a "traditional" barbershop where haircuts, hairstyling, and a variety of surgical and dental operations are all performed.

WHERE'S THE MAP?

This unique adventure comes with an equally unique walk-through map, courtesy of author and illustrator Jason Bradley Thompson. Having created walk-through maps for classic D&D adventures both [old](#) and [new](#), Jason has this time turned his attention to *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, highlighting a number of the new creatures from that book in this chillingly humorous tale of evil barbering. DMs can download the walk-through map [here](#)—but players who might take part in the adventure are warned that the map contains major spoilers.

Unfortunately, the profits from selling those dyes proved not as high as Jooge had hoped. The darklings were soon pestering him to collect his debt. When they couldn't, the moneylenders sold that debt to a strange woman—actually a dreadful **annis hag** named Errevastica in disguise. The possessor of a malevolent magic item called the *evil comb*, the hag had long had her eye on Bezoar, and saw Jooge as a way to take control of the korred. The hag had become the leader of a group of **xvarts** by disguising herself as a beautiful female specimen that came to be known as "Xvartette." Visiting Jooge, the hag quickly took control of him and used him to capture the korred.

A HAIR-RAISING PLOT

By brushing Bezoar's hair with the *evil comb*, Errevastica turned the korred's luxurious locks into evil, living, tentacle-like hair that now does her bidding. Furthermore, the hag knew that this particular korred had a secret magic beyond the natural magic of its kind. Not only does its cut hair transform into the material of the tool or implement that cut it, that hair transforms into a living creature when cut or torn by another living creature's teeth, claws, or hands! Since capturing Bezoar and imprisoning the korred under the watchful gaze of the xvarts, the hag has allowed the xvarts to tear apart clumps of his hair. Those clumps are transformed into new xvarts, rapidly increasing their numbers as fast as the korred's hair can grow.

In a masterstroke of malevolence, the hag then forced Jooge to pull out two clumps of the korred's hair—one touched by the *evil comb* and one untouched. Those two clumps transformed into two new versions of Jooge: an evil version who is the hag's staunch ally, and a good version who was brainwashed to remove all memory of the hag.

Now, while the original Jooge rots in the hag's dungeons below the barbershop, good Jooge runs the shop by day, using it as a cover for the hag's nefarious activities. Evil Jooge runs the shop by night, using it to capture unsuspecting prey. Some of the shop's victims are eaten by the hag or sacrificed by the xvarts in their dungeon below the shop. Others are used by evil

Jooge in his diabolical barbering experiments, and then destroyed or brainwashed and set free.

Saddened by the mysterious changes in her father, yet thankfully unaware of all the evil goings-on below the shop, Jooge's daughter, Mops, spends most of the day alone in her room or playing in the garden. Her only friend is a **boggle**, which is devoted to the young girl but lives in fear of Errevastica.

Now, only the adventurers can stop the evil barber and the annis hag before all of Silverymoon is overrun by xvarts and tormented by evil Jooge's hair-cutting schemes.

ADVENTURE HOOK

The Barber of Silverymoon begins with the characters arriving in the city and hearing rumors of the mysterious disappearances. The first time the characters hear how the returned victims all come back with their hair cropped, colored, and styled in the most exquisite ways, have one of the characters remember spotting Jooge's barbershop as the party entered the city. The rumors the characters hear and their subsequent inquiries eventually lead them toward the shop.

(Though it has its darker moments, this is a whimsical adventure, so don't worry too much about matters such as why no one else in Silverymoon has discovered the connection between Jooge's barbershop and the disappearances.)

INTERVIEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS

If any characters have the guild artisan or entertainer background, or if the players use roleplaying to have their characters engage any city NPCs of your choice in conversation, they learn that the barber-surgeon Jooge Nopsmoth is well regarded both as a good father and an expert barber. He is, however, known to be bad with money, always buying expensive new haircutting equipment and pricey gifts for his daughter, Mops.

More than once, Jooge has taken out small loans from his neighbors, though these are always repaid. His neighbors also know that Jooge has recently taken to carving and selling abstract metal sculptures shaped like locks of hair. (In truth, these are locks of korred hair, which turns to steel when Jooge cuts it with his scissors.)

A COLORFUL BUSINESS PLAN

Jooge's neighbors can also tell the characters that the barber purchased a flail snail from travelling wizards some six months ago, hoping to use it to create unique hair dyes and pigments. Flail snails are rare and valuable, and the people of Silverymoon were

impressed. For a brief time after that, a number of mysterious, short, cloaked figures were seen around the barbershop. Though many of his friends feared that these strangers might be planning a robbery, Jooge seemed unconcerned. In any case, the cloaked figures have not been seen in months.

If the adventurers ask specific questions about Jooge's work, one of his neighbors mentions how Jooge had one of his own teeth replaced with an iron tooth sometime within the last six months. Why Jooge didn't use a gold or porcelain replacement tooth, the neighbor doesn't know.

FOLLOWING THE MONEY

If any of the characters have the charlatan, criminal, or urchin backgrounds, or if the players use roleplaying to have their characters make further inquiries about Jooge's business, they learn that Jooge took out a loan of 10,000 gp from some criminals to buy the flail snail. Further research turns up that Jooge borrowed the money from **darkling** moneylenders—the cloaked figures seen by his friends and neighbors.

With a few clandestine inquiries, the adventurers can set up a meeting with the darklings, who tell the characters that after several unsuccessful attempts to get their money back from Jooge, they sold his debt to a mysterious rich human woman. The woman never gave her name; the darklings know only that she was beautiful (by human standards) except for the false teeth she wore, all of which were crafted of iron. (This woman was the annis hag Errevastica under the effect of its *disguise self* spell.)

If you feel as though the characters might need combat assistance in the adventure, one or two darklings can be hired as mercenaries at a rate of 100 gp each per day.

JOOGE'S BARBERSHOP

From the outside, Jooge's shop and house make up a modest, well-kept building whose only remarkable feature is the flail snail he keeps in his garden. But in the subterranean levels beneath the barbershop, Errevastica the annis hag has created a place of horror.

1A. WELL

The interior walls of this old stone well are damp and slippery. The water's surface is 20 feet below the ground. Climbing down to the water (area 2A) or back up again without the aid of a rope requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

1B. GARDEN

This small backyard garden contains geraniums in bloom, assorted plants and herbs, and Jooge's flail snail. The snail is mostly tame, but it shies away from humanoids it doesn't know. It attacks if touched or cornered. Jooge and Mops are the only ones who know the soothing song that calms the snail down enough for its colorful secretions to be harvested.

1C. BARBERSHOP FRONT DOOR

A statue of a gnome stands out front, holding a sign saying "Open" or "Closed." A string of teeth hangs in the front window, advertising that as a barber-surgeon, Jooge performs dentistry.

1D. BARBERSHOP MAIN ROOM

The talented but humble barber Jooge Nopsmoth works here. His prices are as follows:

- Shave: 5 cp
- Simple haircut: 2 sp
- Fancy haircut: 3–5 sp
- Coloring: 5 sp (in addition to haircut cost)
- Extract tooth: 2 sp
- Root canal: 1 gp
- Leeching (blood extraction): 1 gp
- Battlefield surgery: 5 gp (restores 1d8 hit points; can be performed only once per day per customer)

By day, the "good" false Jooge works here (neutral good **commoner** with Wisdom 6 and Charisma 15; see the *Monster Manual*). Good Jooge is friendly, but he knows nothing about any evil goings-on in the city. Magic such as *detect thoughts* reveals that he is telling the truth, and a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check notes that he seems somewhat distracted and absent-minded. However, a *detect magic* spell cast on this false Jooge notes a faint aura of transmutation magic around him. This aura cannot be dispelled or broken except by a *wish* spell, which turns Jooge back into a pile of hair.

The shop contains a sink, mirrors, a fireplace, and normal barbering and surgery equipment. A secret trapdoor sits under the barber chair, and can be noticed by a character searching the room with a successful DC 21 Wisdom (Perception) check. The trapdoor is barred from below during the day, requiring a successful DC 23 Strength (Athletics) check to break open.

Nothing but the Tooth. Good Jooge's one unusual physical trait is a magic iron tooth replacing his right top bicuspid. The tooth radiates evil under a *detect evil* and *good* spell. If he is asked about the tooth, Jooge doesn't remember where he got it, but assumes that he must have done dentistry on himself and

forgotten about it. The iron tooth allows the annis hag in area 4J to hear through good Jooge's ears. If the hag hears adventurers snooping around, it summons a **banderhobb** and orders the creature to deal with them that night. If any of the characters have Jooge cut their hair, the banderhobb uses that hair as a focus to find the characters and surprise them. If not, the characters might get some warning of the creature as it tracks them, at your discretion.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

At dusk, good Jooge closes his shop, makes dinner for Mops, and goes to bed. Three hours after dusk, evil Jooge (a neutral evil **warlock of the archfey**) ascends from area 3 in the cellars, reopens the shop, and runs it until dawn, accompanied by four **xvarts** from area 4J. The xvarts hide in area 1E, emerging only if evil Jooge is under attack or if he calls for them.

Evil Jooge has adapted the barber chair so that pushing a secret button on its back causes the armrests of the chair to turn into manacles. Anyone sitting in the chair is restrained and cannot use his or her hands. The trapdoor then drops open and the chair automatically slides down a specially constructed groove to area 2C below, with evil Jooge following close behind, then barring the door shut again.

If the adventurers come by while evil Jooge is running the shop, he tries to get the most formidable combatant to sit in the chair, then activates the manacles and drops that character underground. A character restrained in the chair must succeed on a DC 22 Strength (Athletics) check to break free. Jooge then calls in his xvart guards to deal with the other characters before heading downstairs.

1E. STOREROOM

This cluttered backroom contains wine (used as antiseptic), mandrake root and laudanum (both used as anesthetic), hair oils, pomades, scissors, clamps, drills, and other mundane equipment. A hole in the floor leads down to a disused well turned into a leech pit (area 2B), from which Jooge collects the leeches he uses for bloodletting. A Small or smaller creature can climb down the hole. While evil Jooge works at night, his four **xvart** guards are found here, snacking on leeches.

1F. UPSTAIRS LANDING AND KITCHEN

This area holds pots, pans, and dry foodstuffs, as well as a second fireplace with a small stove.

1G. JOOGE'S ROOM

The house's front bedroom contains Jooge's clothes and his life savings of 13 gp and 35 sp. A small portrait from happier times depicts Jooge, Mops, and Giselle, who died a few years ago.

1H. MOPS'S ROOM

Jooge's eight-year-old daughter Mops has a beautifully furnished room full of toys, but she has been sad the last few months because she senses something different about her father. A friendly and nonthreatening adventurer can win Mops's confidence.

If the characters are successful in talking to Mops, she confides that her father sometimes has an iron tooth, and sometimes doesn't. When he has the tooth, her father is absentminded and forgetful. When he doesn't have it, he becomes cruel and temperamental. Also, Mops sometimes hears people downstairs late at night talking in a strange language (these are the xvarts speaking Abyssal).

Mops is frequently visited by her new imaginary friend Wallace—a **boggle** summoned from the Feywild by her loneliness. Errevastica sensed Wallace's presence in the house and quickly cowed him into compliance, and is using him now to distract Mops from her father's state. Wallace will not directly betray Errevastica, but he fears that one day the annis hag might eat his new friend. If anyone threatens Mops, the boggle uses his powers to help Mops escape, even if he dies in the process.

THE CELLARS

Beneath Jooge's house, a series of old cellars and two adjacent wells conceal the annis hag's evil plots.

2A. BOTTOM OF WELL

The well shaft is 40 feet deep in total, with the bottom 20 feet filled with water that flows in from the River Raurin. A Small or smaller creature can squeeze down the narrow water-filled side channel leading to area 2B. Removing the grill that blocks the side channel, or opening the hatch leading to area 3A, requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check made using thieves' tools.

At the bottom of the well, the water is filled with long strands of thick, black hair, all leading down to a clogged circular drain. The hair is living korred hair. If anyone attempts to cut through the hair, the cut strands transform into whatever material was used to cut it (typically steel, if the adventurers are using weapons). Any attempt to cut the hair or open the drain causes the hair to come to life and attack. Treat

the mass of hair as a **roper** (see the *Monster Manual*), but each tendril attack deals 7 (1d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the hair has no bite attack.

If the living mass of hair is killed and cleared away from the drain, water pours from the river into the caverns beyond. See area 4A for details.

2B. LEECH PIT

Small numbers of leeches are found throughout the well water, but they are especially numerous in this disused well. Treat the leeches as a **swarm of insects** with a swimming speed of 10 feet and no other movement modes.

A grill marks the location of the side channel leading to area 2A. Removing the grill requires a successful DC 18 Dexterity check made using thieves' tools.

2C. STAIR

A 5-foot-wide staircase leads down from the barbershop to the cellars below Jooge's house. During the day, the trapdoor to area 1D is barred from below. A specially constructed groove cut into the stairs allows the barber's chair to slide automatically down and be pushed up again.

2D. GUARD ROOM

A single lantern lights this room, which is occupied at all times by eight **xvarts**. They attack any intruders, but the cowardly creatures flee down into area 3 if four or more of them are killed. A bell pull made of thick, dark hair runs up to the ceiling and through a hole in the wall, all the way down to area 4E. When the xvarts pull the hair, the korred in area 4E shouts in pain, and the xvarts in that area know that intruders are coming.

HAIR AND HORROR

Under the direction of evil Jooge, the second level of cellars beneath the shop has been transformed into a horridly efficient evil barbering operation.

3. BARBERSHOP OF EVIL

This cellar has been converted by evil Jooge into the ultimate lair of forbidden barbering techniques. Grooves in the floor allow one of three specially designed barber's chairs to be pushed up the stairs and to most locations on this level (except areas 3E and 3G, which are behind doors). The chamber is lit by lanterns at areas 3A and 3C.

This room is inhabited by evil Jooge by day, and whenever he captures a client. Since splitting off from the original Jooge, evil Jooge has gained magical

abilities and is now a **warlock of the archfey**. He knows that eventually he will become powerful enough that Errevastica will view him as a threat, and so he secretly plots against her even while pretending to care only about his mad barbering experiments.

Evil Jooge's assistant is a **redcap** that eagerly assists in the torment of his clients—sometimes to the point of becoming so excited that it ends evil Jooge's experiments prematurely. Because the redcap was created by Errevastica, it technically serves the hag. However, it spends all its time with evil Jooge and is fond of him. The redcap doesn't know about evil Jooge's plans to betray the annis hag, or vice versa.

Whenever evil Jooge or the redcap are at work here, 1d4 **xvarts** are also in the area, sweeping up hair and mopping up blood.

In addition to the mess caused by evil Jooge's work, this area is filled with thick strands of black hair. This hair emerges from two hair-choked grills in the floor (both leading to area 4E) and from under the door to area 3G. This is korred hair that has turned evil (see area 4).

Evil Jooge is always excited to work on new clients. Any creatures he captures that have hair are taken to area 3A for a wash and cut, then to areas 3E and 3G for color and pomade, and finally to area 3F for drying. Any captured creatures that are hairless or have shaved heads are taken to area 3C for dental work.

3A. WASHING AND CUTTING STATION

Clients' hair is washed in a cold flow of water from the side channel linking areas 2A and 2B. The water is sluiced through a brass hatch that can be opened and closed as an action from this room, or from the channel (see area 2A). Hundreds of brushes, combs, containers of shaving cream, scissors, clippers, razors, and other haircutting and styling implements hang on the walls—alongside shortswords, daggers, hacksaws, and even more dire tools.

Evil Jooge experiments with a variety of different hairstyles. Roll a d3 to determine how many different styles he is inspired to give to a particular client, then roll a d20 and determine each style by consulting the Random Haircuts table. If a client's hair is too short for the haircut evil Jooge wants to give, he either decides to do dental work instead, or he gives the client the ultimate wig (see area 3D).

Evil Comb. Evil Jooge has made his own *evil comb*, in imitation of the larger version owned by the annis hag. When this magic item is used to comb a creature's hair, that hair comes to life and becomes a neutral evil fey creature. Evil hair doesn't have enough intelligence to pretend to be ordinary hair in order to ambush prey. As such, it typically causes

RANDOM HAIRCUTS

d20	Hairstyle
1	Pigtails
2	Buns <i>or</i> bob
3	Braid <i>or</i> ponytail
4	Shaved (usually with symbol or message on the back of the head)
5	Pixie cut <i>or</i> Caesar cut
6	Mohawk <i>or</i> hawkmo
7	Tonsure
8	Cornrows
9	Long and wavy
10	Long ringlets <i>or</i> dreadlocks
11	Crew cut <i>or</i> ivy league
12	Emo <i>or</i> eraserhead
13	Bowl cut <i>or</i> topknot
14	Bouffant <i>or</i> rockabilly
15	Eighteenth-century French women's hairstyle (giant bun shaped like flowers, sailing ships, or other objects)
16	Spikes
17	Medieval European women's hairstyle (pulled back in a net, snood, or balzo)
18	Moptop
19	Beehive <i>or</i> bowl cut
20	Mullet <i>or</i> curly

constant trouble for its bearer. The evil hair is always under the control of the DM, not its bearer. The abilities and combat strength of evil hair depend on its length:

- **Short Cut (Ear Length or Less):** The evil hair is only a nuisance. At a time of your choice, the hair blindfolds or tickles its bearer, imposing disadvantage on a d20 roll. Once the hair does so, it cannot do so again until the character completes a short or long rest. The hair has 4 hit points and Strength 6.
- **Long Cut (Shoulder Length):** Once per round during combat or some other stressful situation, the hair can blindfold or tickle its bearer (as above), or it can attack its bearer: +5 to hit, 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage. The hair has 8 hit points and Strength 12.
- **Very Long Cut (Small of Back or Longer):** Once per round during combat or some other stressful situation, the hair can pick up or manipulate an object, blindfold or tickle its bearer (as above), or attack its bearer or another creature within 5 feet of the bearer: +5 to hit, 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage, or the damage of a weapon the hair is holding. The hair has 8 hit points and Strength 14.

Regardless of its length, evil hair has AC 12, Dexterity 14, Constitution 10, Intelligence 6, Wisdom 10, Charisma 10, and resistance to all damage except slashing damage and fire damage. Attacks that miss the evil hair might hit the hair's bearer, at your

determination. The hair remains evil until 1 week passes, until it is treated with *Knygathin's capable conditioner* (see area 3G), or until the bearer is targeted by a *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spell.

3B. ROT GRUB PIT

Evil Jooge has been experimenting with an alternative to leeching, but it hasn't gone well. This 20-foot-deep pit contains a **swarm of rot grubs**. In the event of a fight in area 3, the xvarts open the brass trapdoor and attempt to push adventurers into the pit.

3C. DENTAL STATION

This area contains a lantern, as well as numerous pinchers, clamps, drills, awls, and other implements of dentistry. Evil Jooge's redcap assistant colors its cap with the bowls of blood that lie scattered around this area.

Evil Jooge is an expert dentist. On a typical patient, he replaces 1d8 troublesome teeth with a selection of gold, silver, and porcelain prosthetics. He is also capable of replacing adventurers' teeth with monster teeth, or with special iron teeth that allow the annis hag to eavesdrop on the characters.

Mask of Laughing. Evil Jooge is assisted in his work by a magic mask whose wearer suffers the effect of the *Tasha's hideous laughter* spell (save DC 14). Slipping the mask over the head of a restrained victim prevents that victim from fighting back while evil Jooge works.

Monster Teeth. The dental station features an impressive selection of teeth from orcs, sharks, ogres, and other monstrous creatures. When implanted in a humanoid creature, these monster teeth grant that creature a bite attack that uses the creature's Strength modifier for the attack roll and deals damage equal to 1d4 plus Strength modifier. The humanoid creature is proficient with this bite attack, which it can use in the same manner as any other melee attack. Additionally, the creature's frightening appearance might impose disadvantage during social interactions or grant advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks, at your determination.

Drill of the Slender Willow. This small, crank-operated power drill was invented by evil Jooge using gnomish technology. If used in combat, the drill is treated as a simple finesse weapon that deals 1d8 piercing damage. However, for each round it is used as a weapon after the first, there is a 10 percent cumulative chance that the device explodes, dealing 3 (1d6) piercing damage to the wielder and causing the drill bit to shoot out toward a random target within 30 feet. That target must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or take 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage.

Drill of the Mighty Oak. This crank-operated jackhammer was invented by evil Jooge using gnomish technology. If used in combat, the drill is treated as a simple two-handed weapon that deals 2d8 piercing damage. However, for each round it is used as a weapon after the first, there is a 10 percent cumulative chance that the device explodes, dealing 11 (2d10) piercing damage to the wielder and all other creatures within 10 feet.

3D. HEAD COLLECTION

The severed heads of some of the many clients who displeased evil Jooge hang in this area, varnished and preserved. Evil Jooge periodically tests hairstyles on these horrid mannequins—including two of the heads that wear Jooge's ultimate wigs.

The Ultimate Wig. When faced with a hairless pate that he cannot style, evil Jooge has been experimenting with what he calls the ultimate wig—which is actually a **mimic** (see the *Monster Manual*). Using his advanced hairdressing skills, evil Jooge can pacify the mimic and direct it to take the undetectable form of any hairstyle he chooses. Unfortunately, he has not figured out how to pacify it permanently, so that the creature comes to life after 1d20 hours, then flows over its wearer in an attempt to eat it. When a mimic wakes in this way, it makes a free attack against its wearer before initiative is rolled, and has advantage on the attack roll.

Unless evil Jooge places one of his ultimate wigs onto a character, the mimics won't attack unless they are attacked first.

3E. COLOR AND DYE ROOM

A wooden door separates this room from the main part of area 3. This area is lit by candles, and contains hundreds of hair dyes, many of them rare and exotic—including Jooge's flail snail dye. Three imprisoned **grungs** (one green, one blue, and one purple) hang in cages here, bought from an exotic merchant caravan. Evil Jooge scrapes the grungs' skin to produce brilliant green, blue, and purple dye. The grungs do not speak Common, but they bellow and chirr if they see anyone who might rescue them. If freed by the characters, the grungs attack any nearby opponents of the party for 1 round, then flee without thanking their rescuers.

Most of the hair dyes stored here are ordinary (albeit high quality), but a few have special effects. Additionally, evil Jooge's notebook of experiments can be found here. Among other things, it describes his attempts to create the world's purest colors using a magical machine of his own invention, which is kept in the lowest level of the dungeon. This *Prismatic*

Coloring Machine (see area 4H) is described in only vague terms.

Green Grung Dye (4 Doses). The labels on these bottles of magical green dye read: "LIFT." When applied to a creature's hair, that hair turns brilliant green—as do the creature's feet and hands. While affected by the dye, the creature acts as though under the effect of a *jump* spell and a *spider climb* spell. However, each time the creature makes use of either magical effect as part of its movement, it takes 2 (1d4) acid damage.

The effects of green grung dye last for 7 days or until the adventurer's hair is washed.

Blue Grung Dye (3 Doses). The labels on these bottles of magical blue dye read: "LOUD." When applied to a creature's hair, that hair turns bright blue and becomes incredibly loud, magically generating intense rustling and crackling sounds each time the creature moves. The creature automatically fails Dexterity (Stealth) checks if another creature might hear it, and it has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks involving hearing.

As a bonus action, the creature can shake its hair to cast *thunderwave* (no components required). If the creature's hair is exceptionally long, the damage from this effect might rise to 3d8 or even 4d8, at your determination. A creature that uses this feature is deafened for one hour afterward. Once the creature uses this feature, it cannot do so again until it finishes a short or long rest.

The effects of blue grung dye last for 7 days or until the adventurer's hair is washed.

Purple Grung Dye (4 Doses). The labels on these bottles of magical purple dye read: "LUSH." When applied to a creature's hair, that hair turns vivid purple and becomes soaking wet, dripping a steady trickle of water. Nothing can dry the creature's hair, whose excess water leaves a purple stain on clothing, cloaks, furniture, and anything else the creature comes into contact with for an extended period.

If the creature wrings out its hair, it produces water and effects in a similar manner to a *decanter of endless water* (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The strength of the effect depends on the length of the adventurer's hair:

- **Short (Ear Length or Less):** A stream of 1 gallon of water
- **Long (Shoulder Length):** A fountain of 5 gallons of water
- **Very long (Small of Back or Longer):** A geyser of 30 gallons of water, 30 feet long and 1 foot wide

Once the creature makes use of this effect, it cannot do so again until it completes a long rest.

The effects of purple grung dye last for 7 days and can't be washed out.

Invisible Dye (4 Doses). These bottles appear to be empty, as the magical dye they hold is invisible. If applied to a creature's hair, that hair becomes permanently invisible. The dye has no effect on skin or other physical features. New hair is visible as it grows out.

Color Remover (5 Doses). These vials hold magical acid that can be splashed onto a creature or thrown (see "Equipment" in the *Player's Handbook*). If applied to a creature's hair, this color remover deals 9 (2d8) acid damage to the creature and burns its hair off down to the skin—but washes out any dye as it does.

3F. BLOW-DRYER

This magical furnace with a hose attached can be locked over the head of a willing—or unwilling—client, blasting out incredible heat. It has four settings, from weakest to strongest.

- **Dry:** This setting dries the client's hair.
- **Wipe:** This setting also dries the client's hair, but the client must then succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or fall into a trance that lasts 1d4 hours. When the client wakes up, he or she has forgotten everything that happened during the previous 24 hours. (This is why none of Jooge's victims remember how they got their haircuts.) These lost memories can't be restored.
- **Bake:** This setting is like "Wipe," except that the client also takes 3 (1d6) fire damage and reduces its Wisdom score by 1d6. This reduction can be undone by a *greater restoration* spell or similar magic.
- **Burn:** Flame bursts out of the hose to fill an area 5 feet wide and 10 feet long, blasting the client for 3 rounds. Each round, the client must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 28 (8d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. After using this setting, the blow-dryer needs 10 minutes to recharge.

If a client doesn't respond to "Wipe," evil Jooge tries "Bake." If that doesn't work, he uses "Burn."

A crafty adventurer can detach the hose from the chair with a successful DC 15 Dexterity check, allowing it to be used as a portable flamethrower. Activating the flamethrower is an action. The hose extends 30 feet from the furnace at its maximum length.

3G. OIL AND POMADE ROOM

A wooden door separates this room from the main part of area 3. Lit by candles, this room is filled with shelves containing various types of pomades, gels, hair oils, and thickeners. The floor and ceiling are covered with a vine-like tangle of black hair, including

strands that extend under the door into area 3, and especially around the rough-hewn stone stairs leading to area 4.

If any Small or larger creature of non-evil alignment walks down the stairs toward area 4, the mass of black hair above the entrance drops down and attacks, using the statistics of a **trapper**. Since the hair is korred hair, any parts of it that are severed are transformed into whatever material cut them (most likely steel if the adventurers attack the hair using weapons).

If the characters explore this area, they discover that a number of the pomades are magical.

Knygathin's Capable Conditioner (3 Doses). The label reads "For Unruly Hair." This magical conditioner removes knots and tangles, and it "tames" evil hair such as that created by the *evil comb*. If rubbed into evil hair as an action, the conditioner turns that hair normal. A single dose will also turn a small section of the korred's hair back to normal, effectively killing the trapper in this room (see above), killing the roper in area 2A, or dispelling an *Evard's black tentacles* effect in area 4.

Medusa Oil (1 Dose). The label reads "Snake Oil." If applied to hair after regular washing over a period of 1 week, this magical oil will first turn a creature's hair into snake-shaped braids, then transform it into small snakes like those of a medusa (see the *Monster Manual*). The hair grants the creature the medusa's power of turning those who see it into stone. Unfortunately, the creature isn't immune to this effect, can't control the snakes, and will turn to stone if it catches sight of its reflection in a mirror. This effect is permanent unless subject to the break enchantment effect of a *dispel evil and good* spell, or similar magic.

Permanent Gel (2 Doses). The label reads "Permanent Gel—Lasts Forever!" The *permanent gel* appears to be just an exceptionally strong hair gel. But if a creature using the magical gel has its hair mussed, or if someone tries to restyle it, the *permanent gel* springs the hair back into its original form, resisting any attempt at change. If the creature using the *permanent gel* attempts to cut its hair or vigorously wash the gel out (it resists rain and mundane moisture), that character earns the gel's wrath. After 1 hour, any cut-out or washed-out blobs of gel coagulate and expand into a **slithering tracker** that pursues the creature and leaps upon it to gel its hair once more. If the creature's hair has been cut so as to make its original hairstyle impossible, the slithering tracker attempts to kill the creature. The slithering tracker can be attacked and killed normally while not in the character's hair. The gel can be destroyed by burning off all the character's hair with fire or acid.

THE CAVERNS

The lowest area of the dungeon is a network of damp, rough-hewn caves that reek of wet hair. The caves are completely dark except when evil Jooge comes down with a lantern.

4. XVART CAVERNS

The xvart caverns are filled with thick cords of Bezoar's hair, which has been brought to life and turned evil by the *evil comb*. Any character who watches the hair for more than a moment sees it slowly coiling and squirming. The hair's sentience is too low to let it attack independently outside of areas 2A and 3G. However, if the annis hag, evil Jooge, or any xvart warlock of Raxivort is present, that individual can use a bonus action to command the hair to attack the adventurers. This special hair attack takes the form of an *Evard's black tentacles* spell that doesn't require concentration and lasts 1d6 rounds. Only one set of hair tentacles can be active in the caves at one time. Once the spell effect ends, roll a d6 at the end of each round, with the hair's ability to form tentacles recharging on a roll of 6.

Any hair that takes damage from fire continues to burn slowly. Unless the smoldering hair is extinguished, the smell fills the caverns in 2d6 rounds, putting all the inhabitants on alert.

HAIR CLONES

If the korred's hair is cut, the cut strands transform into whatever material was used to cut it (typically iron or steel if cut with weapons, scissors, and so forth). If the hair is cut by the teeth, nails, or hands of a living creature and the volume of hair cut is roughly equal to the volume of that creature, the hair transforms into a living duplicate of the creature. A hair clone is identical to the original creature in every way, except that it takes on an evil alignment while maintaining the original creature's alignment component on the lawful-chaotic axis. Additionally, only creatures that are challenge rating 1/4 or less and have no class levels can be cloned. If a stronger creature cuts the korred's hair with teeth, nails, or hands, the resulting clone resembles the original creature but has no class levels and a maximum of 8 hit points.

The magic that creates a hair clone can't be undone by anything other than a *wish* spell. This is a special ability unique to Bezoar, whose hair is unusually magical even for a korred.

4A. BOTTOM OF DRAIN

In the wettest part of the caves, a small pool has formed where thick, gloppy masses of hair clog a

brass drain in the ceiling. Mold and fungus grows copiously here.

If the hair clogging the drain is cut with a typical weapon, the strands turn to iron or steel, leaving the drain even more plugged. If the adventurers instead simply pull on the hair, they can easily unclog the drain. (The hair attacks as a roper only from the area 2A side.) In response, a torrent of water pours into the chamber, pushing any adventurers down the tunnel toward area 4B. Each creature in the chamber must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or take 14 (4d6) bludgeoning damage and be pushed 10 to 40 feet and knocked prone.

If the drain is cleared, water pours from the river into areas 4A through 4I, flooding the lower caves. Errevastica and the xvarts initially panic in response, but if not distracted, the hag uses a solid wall of korred hair transformed to iron to seal the corridor leading to areas 4A, 4B, and 4C. This means that the real Jooge will drown when the water floods the oubliette where he is held prisoner (area 4C).

4B. OUBLIETTE OF BONES

This foul, 30-foot-deep floor cell was once used to hold prisoners. They have all since been eaten, leaving only bones.

4C. JOOGE'S OUBLIETTE

This 30-foot-deep floor cell contains the real Jooge Nopsmoth (neutral good **commoner** with Charisma 15; see the *Monster Manual*). Jooge is aware of everything that has happened and is horrified. If rescued, his first concern is the well-being of his daughter Mops. His second concern is freeing Bezoar, whom he considers a friend.

4D. GUARD POST

Eight **xvarts** and one **xvart warlock of Raxivort** stand watch here, keeping an eye on the korred in area 4E and inventing new ways to differentiate one another, since most of them are hair clones. If they see intruders, one xvart runs to area 4J to alert Xvartette (the annis hag) while the others attack.

4E. KORRED'S PRISON

Bezoar the **korred** is imprisoned here in an iron cage hanging from the ceiling. His hair has grown wild where it extends out from his head and beard to fill the caverns, as well as growing like roots up the drains leading to area 3.

The korred's physical might is suppressed by his being unable to have his feet on the floor, as well as by innate abjuration magic imbued into the cage by

Errevastica. A *dispel magic* spell cast on the cage, a DC 20 Dexterity check made using thieves' tools, or a solid blow dealing 12 or more damage breaks the cage and frees the korred.

Ill-tempered at the best of times, Bezoar is furious at his imprisonment. He might make promises to the adventurers in return for freeing him (which requires cutting his hair after he has left the cage). But being chaotic neutral, he feels no obligation to keep his word, storming off at the first opportunity. Bezoar hasn't seen the real Jooge since before he was captured, so he thinks Jooge joined forces with the annis hag to betray him. If the adventurers and the real Jooge carefully explain the situation, Bezoar calms down and agrees to help the adventurers defeat the annis hag.

4F. TABAXI OUBLIETTE

This 30-foot-deep floor cell contains Two Llamas Running, a chaotic good tabaxi **swashbuckler** from the faraway land of Maztica. Impressed by her fur, evil Jooge gave her a discount to get her into his shop, but Two Llamas resisted the blow-dryer's memory wiping. Rather than kill her, evil Jooge and the annis took her prisoner, intending to eventually use her body parts for magical reagents or hair products.

If freed by the party, Two Llamas shows her gratitude by helping fight the xvarts. Use the swashbuckler statistics from *Volo's Guide to Monsters*, but Two Llamas also has the following tabaxi traits:

- Darkvision out to 60 feet.
- A climbing speed of 20 feet.
- A claws attack—*Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit*: 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage.
- Additional skill modifiers—Perception +2, Stealth +6; passive Perception 12

Two Llamas can use her claws attack as part of her multiattack, but if any of the characters has a spare rapier or dagger, she asks to borrow those weapons to improve her effectiveness in combat.

4G. TEMPLE OF RAXIVORT

Gruesomely decorated with skulls and bones, this room contains the xvarts' sacrificial altar to their evil god and creator, Raxivort. The room is usually inhabited by eight **xvarts** and one **xvart warlock of Raxivort**, who presides over sacrifices made here.

The warlock was the priest-leader of the xvarts before Errevastica came along. Alone among the xvarts, he bears a grudge against the annis hag for winning over the hearts of his comrades and taking them away from the 'correct path' of sacrificing other humanoids and tithing to the high priest. Afraid to

rebel openly, he continues to ritually sacrifice whichever of evil Jooge's unsuccessful clients are not incinerated by the blow-dryer or eaten by the annis hag. In a pouch under his kilt he carries 75 gp, 300 cp, and three rubies worth 150 gp each.

4H. THE PRISMATIC COLORING MACHINE

This massive machine, which pulses visibly and radiates an aura of power, is evil Jooge's greatest invention. It taps into extradimensional forces to reach a dimension of pure color, where hues are the expression of primal forces beyond mortal understanding. The cavern walls around the ominous iron device are streaked with kaleidoscopic patterns and rainbow shades.

It takes two creatures to successfully operate the *Prismatic Coloring Machine*: one to work the controls, and one to sit in the chair and have its hair done. Roll a d8 and determine the result below for the creature in the chair. (If evil Jooge is operating the machine, he can roll twice and use whichever result he wants.) Additionally, if the creature operating the machine is not a trained barber, it must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check or the creature having its hair done has disadvantage on saving throws against the machine's effects.

1—Red. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 35 (10d6) fire damage. On a successful save, the creature's hair permanently transforms into fire. The creature gains resistance to fire damage and vulnerability to cold damage, and its fiery, glowing hair imposes permanent disadvantage on its Dexterity (Stealth) checks. Additionally, if the creature's hair is shoulder length or longer, it can use an action to shake its hair and cast *burning hands* (no components required). Once the creature uses this feature, it cannot do so again until it finishes a short rest.

2—Orange. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 35 (10d6) acid damage. On a successful save, the creature's hair permanently transforms into an ooze. The creature gains resistance to acid damage. Additionally, if the creature's hair is shoulder length or longer, it can use a bonus action to make a melee attack against a target within 5 feet of it. On a hit, the attack deals 3 (1d6) plus Strength modifier bludgeoning damage and 3 (1d6) acid damage. If the creature's hair reaches the small of its back or is longer, this damage increases to 7 (2d6) plus Strength modifier bludgeoning damage and 7 (2d6) acid damage.

The ooze hair is partly self-willed, and it might eat small organic objects—or creatures—that it can reach while its host is sleeping. Additionally, if the

host creature dies, its consciousness enters the ooze hair. If the creature's body is not destroyed, the creature reincarnates 24 hours later as a **gelatinous cube** or **ochre jelly** (creature's choice; see the *Monster Manual* for both creatures). The reincarnated ooze has the original creature's memories, as well as its Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores.

3—Yellow. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 35 (10d6) lightning damage. On a successful save, the creature's hair permanently transforms into a mass of electricity. The creature gains resistance to lightning damage, but its glowing, sparking hair imposes permanent disadvantage on its Dexterity (Stealth) checks. Additionally, the creature can use an action to shake its hair and cast *shocking grasp* (no components required). Once the creature uses this feature, it can't do so again until it finishes a short rest.

If the creature's hair reaches the small of its back or is longer, it can instead use an action to cast *lightning bolt* (no components required). Once the creature uses this feature, it can't do so again until it finishes a long rest.

4—Green. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 35 (10d6) poison damage. On a successful save, the creature's skin turns green and scaly as it transforms permanently into a yuan-ti of your choice (typically a **yuan-ti pureblood**; see the *Monster Manual*). If this transformation is imposed on a character, he or she must also succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become permanently neutral evil.

5—Blue. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 35 (10d6) cold damage. On a successful save, the creature's hair permanently transforms into a mass of translucent ice crystals that are freezing cold to the touch. The creature gains resistance to cold damage. Additionally, if the creature's hair is shoulder length or longer, it can use an action to shake its hair and cast *ice knife* (no components required; see the *Elemental Evil Player's Companion*). Once the creature uses this feature, it cannot do so again until it finishes a short rest.

If the creature's hair reaches the small of its back or is longer, it can instead use an action to cast *Snilloc's snowball swarm* (no components required; see the *Elemental Evil Player's Companion*). Once the creature uses this feature, it can't do so again until it finishes a long rest.

6—Indigo. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it turns to stone and is permanently petrified. Whether or not the creature turns to stone, its hair is transformed into a mass of glittering gems. This gem hair retains the flexibility and softness of normal hair until it is

cut, at which point it hardens. If all the creature's hair is cut, the resulting gems are worth $1d6 \times 100$ gp for short hair; $1d6 \times 500$ gp for shoulder-length hair; or $1d6 \times 1,000$ gp for hair that extends to the small of its back or is longer. If the creature is not petrified (or if it is returned to normal with *greater restoration* or similar magic), its new hair grows back in as gems, allowing it to be repeatedly cut and sold at a frequency determined by the DM.

7—Violet. The creature must attempt a DC 17 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, it is permanently blinded. Whether or not the creature is blinded, its hair becomes a gateway to another plane of existence (the DM determines which plane). The size of the gateway, and what can fit through it, depends on the style and length of the creature's hair. Strange monsters might emerge through the creature's hair, and the creature and its allies might be able to enter the hair gate to explore the other plane.

8—Special. The target is hit by two colors. Roll twice more, rerolling any result of 8.

Undoing Effects. The effects imposed by the *Prismatic Coloring Machine* can be undone only by a *wish* spell (though creatures blinded or petrified by the machine can have those conditions removed by *lesser restoration* and *greater restoration*, as normal). With the exception of creatures affected by the machine's indigo setting, any affected creature that removes its hair by cutting, fire, acid, or any other means remains under the effects imposed by the machine.

The *Prismatic Coloring Machine* is unstable. Each time it is used within a 24-hour period, there's a 10 percent cumulative chance that it explodes, hitting every creature within 60 feet of it with the effect of a *prismatic spray* spell.

4I. ABJURER OUBLIETTE

This 30-foot-deep floor cell contains Bernadette, a neutral **abjurer** and member of the Arcane Brotherhood—the legendary mage's order of Luskan. Bernadette was captured by evil Jooge while getting her hair curled, and it was from her that evil Jooge learned the magic secrets he used to build the *Prismatic Coloring Machine*. Bernadette promises to reward any adventurers who free her from the pit, and she makes good on her word (see "Concluding the Adventure"). Although still able to cast cantrips, she has been unable to escape the pit without her spellbook, which is held by the hag in area 4J.

4J. XVARTS' LAIR

This huge cave filled with hair, filth, and rats, is home to forty-five **xvarts**, two **xvart warlocks of Raxivort**,

and Errevastica the **annis hag**. Errevastica is never in her true form, instead maintaining the illusion of being Xvartette, a 10-foot-tall, purple-skinned, female xvart of rare beauty (at least as far as the other xvarts are concerned). The hag always holds the *evil comb*, which she uses to groom Bezoar's ever-growing hair.

The xvarts are infatuated with the annis hag and do her bidding without question, even overcoming their usual fear of larger humanoids in their zeal to impress her. Using the korred's hair to generate more of themselves, they hope eventually to create an army (led by Xvartette) capable of conquering all other races. They have no idea of the annis hag's true form, and would likely flee in panic if they saw it—as happens if Errevastica reverts to her true form after being killed in combat.

Errevastica looks forward to seeing evil spread in Silverymoon—and to feast on the citizens and children of the city. Her xvarts have so far been engaging only in acts of stealthy robbery aboveground, but when her army is large enough, she plans to send it forth to engage in ever-greater acts of malice and murder. She encourages evil Jooge's experiments but keeps one eye on him, wary that he might become too powerful.

Evil Comb. The original full-sized version of the *evil comb* requires two hands for a Medium humanoid to hold. It has the same magical effects as the smaller *evil comb* that evil Jooge created (see area 3A), but it can also be used as a two-handed magic melee weapon with a +1 bonus on attack rolls and damage rolls. Attacks with the comb deal 6 ($2d4 + 1$) plus Strength modifier piercing damage, or 11 ($4d4 + 1$) plus Strength modifier piercing damage to any creature with hair that is shoulder length or longer.

TREASURE

Beneath a pile of rags, humanoid bones, and shampoo-slime behind Errevastica's throne is the treasure that has been offered up to the annis hag by the xvarts: 1,325 gp, 2,500 sp, 625 cp, a golden spindle worth 150 gp, a *potion of resistance (poison)*, a *potion of fire breath*, a *spell scroll of cure wounds*, assorted small pieces of jewelry worth a total of 750 gp, and Bernadette's spellbook (see area 4I).

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

If Errevastica is killed, she reverts to her normal form. This causes any surviving xvarts to panic, breaking off from combat and fleeing the dungeon. Reports are heard across Silverymoon of xvarts bolting into the wilderness, but the survivors are never seen again.

With the threat of the annis hag ended, the characters earn the gratitude of the folk of Silverymoon, the eternal friendship of Jooge and Mops, and free haircuts for life. Local authorities take

responsibility for cleaning out and sanctifying the cellars and caverns beneath Jooge's house, which are then sealed off.

Bernadette arranges for the *Prismatic Coloring Machine* to be safely neutralized and taken away by operatives of the Arcane Brotherhood, and has a reward of 100 gp per character sent to the adventurers within the next month for saving her. (If Bernadette did not survive, mages from the Arcane Brotherhood travel to Silvermoon to collect her body and neutralize the *Prismatic Coloring Machine* if they are notified of her death.)

If good Jooge survives the adventure, the original Jooge insists on taking his clone in to live with him and Mops, with the two treating each other as brothers. With two talented barbers working the shop, both Jooges are finally able to get their collective finances in order.

SIX FACES OF DEATH

A dark fantasy adventure for characters of 11th to 13th level



An alien being, dark omens, and vanishing ships send the adventurers to a mysterious island newly appeared in the Sea of Swords. But can the characters uncover the mysteries of the Changing Island in time to save Faerûn from a terror from another plane?

Design and Cartography by
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Beyond the Material Plane lie dimensions where gods and devils dwell, and where pure ideals are embodied in physical form. One such place is Mechanus, the plane of ultimate law, where the geometric modrons maintain absolute order. Another is Acheron, home to endless battlefields of law and evil, where reborn warriors fight eternal conflicts of metal and blood.

No stars or suns appear in the skies of Acheron—only floating metal cubes hurtling through the void. One of these was Cube 1717, designed by a mad derro architect named Avnas, and ruled by a powerful devil named Earl Andromalius—a servant of the god of tyranny, Lord Bane.

Cube 1717's primary purpose was as a battle station in Acheron's endless wars. But it also contained a prison and laboratory where horrifying experiments were carried out upon court-martialed soldiers and other doomed souls. Some became food for horrid monsters. Others were used for weapons testing and destroyed by steel and hellfire. Once, three particularly cunning conspirators who tried to unseat Earl Andromalius were fused together into a horrible undead entity—a skull lord named Vargo, doomed to suffer forever in the prisons of the cube.

UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Not long ago, a planar rift brought an unusual creature to Acheron, where it was discovered by Earl Andromalius's servants. It was a quadrone—one of the cubical warriors of the modrons, left broken in body and mind by being cut off from the order of Mechanus.

When the creature was brought to Avnas, the insane derro subjected it to bizarre experiments that drove the already unstable quadrone completely mad. Under the duress of the testing, the quadrone was corrupted by the magic of Acheron to develop a heretofore unheard-of power: the ability to control other beings and make them into creatures like itself.

Exponentially growing in power and size, the Archquadrone escaped its captivity and penetrated to the engine room at the heart of Cube 1717. There, it fused its body with the cube's engines, creating a living brain whose first task was to instigate the deadly **pixelating curse**—a magical malady that transforms creatures and objects into lawful neutral cube creatures serving the dictates of the Archquadrone.

The infection spread quickly throughout Cube 1717, transforming thousands of Acheronian soldiers into cube-like mockeries of life. Earl Andromalius was killed and overthrown, and with the power of Cube 1717 at their command, the Archquadrone's cube-creatures soon threatened Acheron itself.

To deal with this threat, the princes and dukes of Acheron were forced to seek the aid of the yugoloths—mercenary creatures of pure evil. The strength of their combined forces allowed the devils and the yugoloths to besiege the cube, slaughtering its defenders. In the end, the yugoloths were forced to use the River Styx as a weapon, inundating Cube 1717 with its waters to cleanse both the memories of the dead and the curse that infected them.

PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Six Faces of Death is a dark fantasy adventure featuring countless fiends, mind control, strange physical transformations, and dead bodies by the thousands. Before running the scenario, you'll want to make sure that your players are aware that the adventure features plenty of dark imagery and horror themes. Even then, you might want to downplay some of the more graphic descriptions contained herein, according to your own sensibilities as a DM and the ages and sensitivities of your players.

The adventure is also a dangerous one—and might prove a challenge even for powerful 11th-to-13th-level characters! On the bright side, though, the scenario also features a lot of humor that you can use to lighten the overall dark tone. And as with many *Dungeons & Dragons* adventures, the difficulty level can be adjusted on the fly by giving the characters allies (the monodrone, the shadar-kai, the drow, and potentially even the oinoloth and the hydroloths), making sure they learn appropriate background information before they travel to the mysterious island, and adjusting the efficiency of the enemies' lair defense.

Before the adventure begins, take note of whether any characters are chaotic. This is important in determining how resistant they are to the Archquadrone's pixelating curse.

To run a particularly dangerous version of the adventure, use pregenerated characters and start the adventure with a shipwreck that leaves the party stranded on the Changing Island with no preparation. Can the characters uncover the island's many mysteries—and how long will they survive as they try?

Attempting to escape, the Archquadrone's pixelated servants tore open a planar rift that sent Cube 1717 hurtling into the Material Plane. In a storm of fire and infernal energy, the cube appeared above the Sea of Swords in western Faerûn before sinking into its depths.

SIGNS AND SURVIVORS

Most of the Archquadrone's servants died and were unpixelated in the Styx's purifying waters. But deep within the cube—at the bottom of the Sea of Swords and still surrounded by a bubble of black Styx water—a handful of entities survived: Avnas the derro, whose chaotic nature had temporarily protected her from the pixelation; a group of abishai priests of Tiamat who were protected by the power of a sacred statue of their god; and the skull lord Vargo, who managed to escape its imprisonment during the chaos of the battle. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the derro, the abishai, and the skull lord.)

Exploring the sunken cube's lightless depths, Vargo came to the central engine room, where it found the Archquadrone failing and close to destruction. With the combined intelligence of its three heads, Vargo discovered that it could attach those heads to parts of the Archquadrone's six-sided brain to bring Cube 1717 back to life—and to make itself the cube's master. The control system Vargo created is called the Six-Face Throne, a complex device that has allowed the skull lord to restore the cube's internal power and gravity systems, and to bring it to the surface of the Sea of Swords.

Word of the cube's destination reached the yugoloths, who became alarmed at it having been reactivated—and doubly alarmed that the Acheronians might ask for their money back. A strike force sent out to finish the job of destroying the cube ended in failure, though—and with the capture of an oinoloth that was one of the force's leaders. The hextons of Mechanus sent their own forces to finish the job, but those too were overcome. Word of this strange new island then brought numerous sailors and explorers into the area to investigate, but all have been killed or captured—with survivors forced to join Vargo's pixelated army.

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

When an important NPC vanishes in the area of the mysterious island, the adventurers are inspired or called upon to investigate. Traveling to the Changing Island with a mad monodrone (a survivor of the modron strike force) as their guide, they must find and rescue their pixelated friend, defeat the skull lord, and end the curse.

But Vargo has been waiting for just such an opportunity, hoping to entice highly intelligent adventurers to the island. By grafting the severed heads of those individuals onto its own body, the undead hopes to become a six-headed skull lord and fully reactivate Cube 1717, turning it into a flying, mobile battle station with thousands of pixel soldiers under its undead command.

Can the adventurers stop the combined forces of pure evil and pure law? Or will all Faerûn become a pixelated wasteland in thrall to the six faces of death?

CHARACTERS AND FACTIONS

The following roster summarizes the key NPCs and monsters the characters are likely to meet during the adventure.

CONTROLLERS OF THE CUBE

Vargo and its servants control Cube 1717, and will do whatever it takes to maintain the skull lord's hold on the cube's power.

Vargo. Created from the bodies of three evil adventurers, the **skull lord**^M Vargo has spent hundreds of years in Acheron. The personalities of the undead's three heads have merged over that time. It commands all the pixelated creatures and controls three faces of the Six-Face Throne—two directly, and the third



SKULL LORD

through its servant, Sladek. Vargo seeks sufficiently intelligent adventurers to graft onto itself, allowing it to activate the cube's full power and conquer Faerûn. See area 6.31 for more information.

Sladek. A genasi mage who journeyed to the island and became pixelated, Sladek is the NPC who inspires the characters' rescue mission—but they are unaware that he is now a pixelated **mage**, one of Vargo's allies, and one of the controllers of the Six-Face Throne. The most intelligent of the pixelated creatures transformed by the cube, Sladek now seeks to spread the pixelating curse to every living creature. See area 6.11B for more information.

Avnas. This crazed **derro savant**^M is a mad scientist, an architect, and the only survivor of Earl Andromalius's retinue. She serves Vargo out of a mad desire to see what might happen if the skull lord is able to claim the power it seeks. See area 6.17 for more information.

Bunch. A **berbalang** that came to the island to gather the bones of the dead, Bunch is resistant to the pixelating curse because of the creature's extraplanar nature. (The **berbalang** appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.) It serves Vargo in return for skulls and bones. See area 6.13 for more information.

Balhannoth and Oblex. A **balhannoth** was brought onto the island by a party of drow explorers as a servitor monster. Transformed into a pixelated creature, it now serves Vargo and Sladek. An **adult oblex** is the product of one of the horrid experiments conducted

MONSTERS AND MAGIC

Most of the monsters in this adventure are taken from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. When a monster name appears in bold, it means that creature appears either in that book or the *Monster Manual*. The first time a monster appears in the adventure, the text notes if it appears in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. If the name appears in bold thereafter, a superscript 'M' indicates that the creature appears in that book.

A number of new magic items found on Cube 1717 are found in the "New Magic Items" appendix at the end of the adventure. All other magic items are found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*.

in Cube 1717's laboratory. It, too, serves the skull lord. The balhannoth and the oblex both appear in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. See "Face 5: Beautiful Island" for more information.

OTHER FACTIONS

A number of creatures within the cube might prove to be friends or foes to the characters—or both.

'Nameless.' Met by the characters at the start of the mission, this mad **monodrone** has suffered damage that has caused it to go rogue. Terrified of the "bad square boss" inside the cube island, it picks one of the characters as its new boss and latches onto them, following them anywhere—but communication with the creature is difficult. See "Mad Monodrone," below, for more information.

Fern. The only survivor of a shadar-kai expedition to explore the island, Fern is a shadar-kai **shadow dancer** with partial memory loss as a result of contact with Styx water. She seeks to find Astilbe, a fallen friend. See area 1.3 for more information on Fern, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the shadar-kai.

Simak. This **drow house captain** is the only survivor of a drow expedition she led to the island, and has kept herself alive by becoming a kind of court jester to Vargo. Simak originally came to the cube hoping to activate its power and use it as a flying war engine, but her primary goal now is to make a safe escape. See area 6.11C for more information on Simak, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on the drow.

By sheer chance, a family-heirloom *amulet of the Styx* that Simak wears makes her immune to the pixelating curse, because of the Styx water it holds inside it. See the "New Magic Items" appendix for more information.

Abishai Priests. A group of **white abishai** and **black abishai** are worshipers of Tiamat whose faith saved them when Cube 1717 was nearly destroyed. Still unpixelated, they have so far avoided Vargo and are desperate to escape the island. See area 6.38 and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the abishai.

Malika Tahoun. This plague-ridden **oinoloth** was the leader of the yugoloth strike force sent to the material realm to destroy the cube. As utterly selfish as all yugoloths, it surrendered to Vargo to avoid being killed. Vargo is keeping Malika around as a backup controller for the Six-Face Throne, in the event that the skull lord can't find a sufficient number of new heads. (It won't graft the oinoloth's head onto itself, because the creature's plagues can infect even its undead body.) See area 6.11A for more information on Malika, and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more on oinoloths.

Malika wears an airtight outfit that protects it from infection by the pixelating curse, and that also protects those around the oinoloth from its multitude of diseases. The mask and gloves also conceals the oinoloth's fiendish appearance.

Hydroloths. The only other survivors of the yugoloth assault lurk in what the denizens of the cube call "the Styx sea"—the volume of black Styx water that surrounds the island. While they wait for Malika Tahoun to return, they kill any creatures that might

spread the pixelating curse. See "Invisible Guardians" and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the hydroloths.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Six Faces of Death is a wide-open adventure, in which random chance and the players' choices are the only determiners of their progress through Cube 1717.

In the first stage of the adventure, the characters investigate the mysterious Changing Island. This stage plays out largely as a mystery and survival story, as the characters deal with deadly hydroloths, vampiric mist, the random rotation of the cube, and other threats. Figuring out how to get inside is the primary challenge of this section of the adventure—but that challenge can take many forms, depending on which faces of the cube the characters have a chance to explore.

Once they get inside, the characters' primary motivation is to fight the cube's defenders as they learn more about its origin and purpose. Against the overarching goal of rescuing the genasi mage Sladek, the characters might also decide that they're obliged to destroy the cube, wanting to prevent its destructive power from being unleashed in Faerûn.

Alternatively, instead of fighting the cube's defenders, the characters might parley with them. This could be an even more dangerous option, however, since the skull lord Vargo has diabolical plans for suitably intelligent guests. If the characters do parley with the evil defenders of the cube, take the opportunity to roleplay the disturbing, diabolical, and potentially funny personalities of those defenders.

Exploring the cube makes for a classic and challenging "invade the fortress" scenario. Pixelated creatures can all communicate telepathically with each other to a range of 120 feet, making it easy for them to advise other pixelated creatures or the skull lord of the movements and positions of intruders. If higher-level characters are having too easy a time against the cube's pixelated guardians, you can easily add additional guardians or give them maximum hit points to raise the challenge.

Pixelated merregon devils and pixelated veterans serve as the cube's guards (see the "Pixelated Guards" sidebar on the next page). Other pixelated creatures that can join a coordinated defense of the fortress include Avnas and her gray render (see area 6.17), the skull lord's personal army of zombies and skeletons in area 6.21, and the adult oblex and the balhannoth from face 5.

If the characters end up overwhelmed by the threats on the cube, you might want to throw them a lifeline in the form of unexpected help. Perhaps the shadar-kai and the drow expeditions weren't totally wiped out, and their forces are also currently exploring the cube to draw off its defenders or join in during a key fight.

On top of all the other dangers of the cube, the characters must finish their quest and escape the island before the pixelating curse transforms them into pixelated creatures. Only characters who are immune to disease can ignore this threat, and characters who can

cure disease (as well as spellcasters who can cast *dispel magic* or *remove curse*) will be kept busy.

If certain characters become infected, players who enjoy roleplaying might like the additional challenge of having infected characters become increasingly at odds with their healthy companions. Especially when a character reaches mental level 3 of the curse, let the character's player interpret their insanity rather than you telling them what their character is doing.

THE SKULL LORD'S PLAN

As all its heads once were in life, Vargo is intelligent and charismatic, and the skull lord won't foolishly rush into battle with intruders. If at all possible, it tries to approach the characters as potential allies, assuring them that despite its horrific undead appearance, it wants to be a resource for them. Vargo will describe itself as being trapped on the cube, and will encourage characters to work with it so they can all safely escape.

Vargo is never without its bodyguards (see area 6.31). But if the skull lord has the chance, it presents those bodyguards as 'captors', similar to the two pixelated guards watching Malika Tahoun in area 6.11A.

Vargo might make use of any or all of the following deceptions and half-truths when talking to the characters:

- Vargo didn't cause the pixelating curse (true), and doesn't even know where it came from (technically true). The skull lord is as ignorant as the characters are about what's going on (false).
- Vargo's enemies are ruthless evil fiends—the yugoloths—who will also kill the characters if they find them on the cube (true). Vargo and the party must work together to stop them!

PIXELATED GUARDS

Two types of guards now serve the skull lord, and can be found throughout the cube. Merregon devils (from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) originally served as sentries on Cube 1717, and are joined now by humanoid veterans representing both the reborn souls that once fought and died in Acheron and the adventurers and sailors that have been pixelated since coming to the island.

Transformed by the pixelating curse, a pixelated **merregon** or pixelated **veteran** has its original statistics with the following changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

If you add additional guards to the adventure, you can use pixelated merregons or pixelated veterans, as you choose. Pixelated veterans might show differences in their arms, armor, and physical features, and representatives of the drow and the shadar-kai that came to the island might be found among them.

Not all the humanoids who came to the island were veterans, but using the veteran stat block is a useful shortcut during play. If any pixelated veterans are returned to their normal form, you can use other statistics for them that are more appropriate.

- Vargo is a prisoner of the pixelated creatures (false), which seek to capture the characters as well (true).
- The cube is a damaged flying battle station, which Vargo has figured out how to reactivate (true). Only sufficiently intelligent people can interface with the cube (true), and if the characters help the skull lord reactivate it, they can all make use of its power (false).
- The cube is capable of traveling from plane to plane (false). Vargo just wants to reactivate the cube so that it can leave the Material Plane (false; Vargo wants to conquer the Material Plane).
- The pixelated creatures aren't innately evil (technically true but irrelevant; the pixelated creatures' overarching goal is to spread the pixelation curse to all things).
- Vargo was a prisoner in the cube for hundreds of years, cruelly punished for trying to overthrow the cube's devil lord (true). Thus, the skull lord would never inflict such suffering on anyone else (false).

If the characters engage Vargo, the skull lord attempts to use them in one of three ways. First, it wants their aid in defeating the hydroloths that guard the waters around the cube, and in destroying the vampiric mists on the surface. Second, it hopes to see them become pixelated, coming under its control as they join its army of pixelated creatures. Third, the skull lord wants to use characters with an Intelligence of 14 or higher to attune to the Six-Face Throne, making the cube even more powerful.



PIXELATED MERREGON

GETTING AHEAD

Vargo doesn't tell the characters that they can simply plug themselves into the Six-Face Throne to attune to it (see area 6.28), sharing the power of the cube as equals. The skull lord's much more evil plan is to identify a character or NPC with an Intelligence of 14 or higher, take them to the surgery at area 6.22, get the drop on them—then sever the character's head for grafting onto the skull lord's own shoulders. Vargo's shoulders have room for six heads in total, and the skull lord believes that any newly grafted head will be at least temporarily dominated by its own preexisting personality. The extra head will thus simply serve as an extra brain with which to unlock more powers of the cube.

From the moment Vargo and Bunch (the skull lord's berbalang assistant, who knows of its plan) begin interacting with the characters, both try to assess their intelligence. Bunch uses obvious questions and intelligence tests (see area 6.13), but Vargo is more clever. It might ply the characters with questions about history or scholarly knowledge, or challenge them to games in the library (area 6.29). Vargo focuses on wizards for special attention.

Once it has a fairly good idea which characters are the smartest, the skull lord tries to separate them from their companions. Other characters are allowed to roam the fortress (but not to go out onto the surface), with Vargo hoping that they eventually pixelate. Intelligent characters are attacked, incapacitated (the brain donor must be alive before the procedure), and dragged to the surgery so Vargo can operate.

In the interest of not railroading a character into this fate, Vargo takes an NPC as its first target, starting with Fern or Simak (if the drow's subterfuge of idiocy fails). If the skull lord gains a fourth head, its first action is to make that head start drinking the Styx water that one of its own heads must drink to counter the pixelating curse. As a result, it regains its full skull lord statistics (see area 6.31). The skull lord also becomes visibly taller, though this has no immediate game effect.

If the new head is an NPC, Vargo automatically succeeds at crushing its personality and turning it into nothing more than spare memory storage for the skull lord's dominant brains. If the new head is a character, give the character's player a chance for the head to retain its sense of self by succeeding on two out of three consecutive Charisma contests against Vargo. If the character succeeds, the player retains the ability to speak, think, and occasionally control Vargo's body by winning Charisma contests as you determine.

Only a *wish* spell can restore a character whose head has been grafted onto the skull lord. As Vargo adds more heads, its personality becomes more cold and megalomaniacal—even as occasional flashes of the preferences and personalities of the minds it has absorbed come to the fore.

THE SUPER SKULL LORD

If Vargo gains a fifth head, the skull lord continues to grow in stature and power. In addition to becoming taller, its statistics change as follows:

- Its Strength increases to 16. This increases the attack and damage modifiers of its bone staff attack by 1.
- Its Constitution increases to 19. This increases its hit points to 119 (14d8 + 56).

If the skull lord gains a sixth head, it grows even taller and its final statistics change as follows:

- Its Strength increases to 18. This increases the attack and damage modifiers of its bone staff attack by 1.
- Its Constitution increases to 21. This increases its hit points to 133 (14d8 + 70).
- Its Charisma increases to 23. This increases its spell save DC to 19 and its spell attack bonus to +11.

MISSING SHIPS AND TALKING CUBES

The adventure begins in a lawless port city from which the characters set out to the Changing Island, an hour away by ship. The assumed setting is the Sea of Swords, but you can modify the adventure to start out in any chaotic port city in Faerûn or another campaign world.

STARTING POINTS

Any of the following locations make a good start to the adventure in a Forgotten Realms campaign.

Waterdeep. The greatest city of the Sword Coast features numerous guilds, magical orders, mercantile enterprises, adventuring companies, and criminal organizations that might have an interest in exploring the Changing Island. Alternatively, you might decide to start the adventure off in Skullport. This underground city of criminals, slavers, and evil mages lies beneath Waterdeep, and is part of the great dungeon complex of Undermountain.

Athkatla. “The city of coin” is a huge port city of humans and halflings. With over a hundred thousand inhabitants, the city is the capital of the land of Amn, just south of the Sword Coast. Numerous powerful factions here might already be vying for control of the Changing Island by the time the characters set out to explore it.

Ioma. Home to fewer than a thousand people, Ioma is one of several small pirate ports in the Nelanther Isles, south of the Sea of Swords. The Nelanther pirates are cruel and lawless, and Ioma is ruled with an iron fist by a small group of Cowled Wizards—members of a secret arcane order in Amn.

Port Nyanzaru. The capital of the jungle peninsula of Chult, Port Nyanzaru is detailed in *Tomb of Annihilation*. Though not as lawless and dangerous as some of the other cities in this section, it makes an excellent potential starting point for the adventure.

Ajayib. Sometimes called the City of Wonders, Ajayib is one of the “Pearl Cities”—wealthy seaports on the coast of the desert land of Zakhara, far to the south of the Sword Coast.

Dragonisle. Moving the adventure to the Sea of Fallen Stars, inland and east of the Sword Coast, gives you the option to use Dragonisle as a starting point. The largest of the Pirate Isles, the island is dominated by the eight-thousand-foot-high mountain known as the Earthspur.

Some four thousand pirates dwell here, with most found in the city sometimes known as Immurk's Hold.

FRIENDS AND ALLIES

The setup of the adventure assumes that the characters know people in the port close to where the Changing Island has appeared. But if you're playing the adventure as a one-shot, or if you want to give the characters an additional NPC ally in the area, you can introduce them to Lem—a local **priest** of Kelemvor, Lord of the Dead.

Clad in gray and lawful neutral in alignment, Lem works to prepare dead bodies for burial by bathing them in scented holy water, thus ritually washing away their sins. She gladly offers advice on the afterlife, undead, curses, and similar matters, and can provide *potions of healing* if the characters need them.

When the characters meet with Lem, she confides to them that a few nights earlier, she had a dark dream warning her of evil on the Changing Island. As such, she warns them to be careful on their journey.

THE MYSTERIOUS CHANGING ISLAND

Whatever port the adventurers start out in, they soon hear that a mysterious island has recently appeared in the sea, an hour away by ship. No one has set foot on the island and come back to tell the tale, and sailors have given conflicting descriptions of it, causing it to be nicknamed “the Changing Island.”

The mysterious island was first sighted two weeks before. Since then, the following information has become known to all folk in the port where the adventure begins. Be sure to give the characters this information before they leave port. Establishing the mystery of the Changing Island gives the players a number of vital clues they need before they go there.

- Shortly after the island was first sighted, the sea around it became covered by an unnaturally thick bank of fog. That fog never lifts, leaving the island in a perpetual gray twilight.
- The water around the island is somehow different than the surrounding sea. It is black and silty, offers poor visibility, and feels unnaturally cold. No fish swim in this mysterious black water, which features a clear dividing line from the blue-green sea.
- The island is unnaturally square and about six hundred feet across. A number of hills and valleys can be seen rising beyond the shore, but it's impossible to make out details through the fog.
- A number of explorers have landed ships on the island, but none have returned to tell of what they found. A number of the ships that approached the island have vanished, while others have been found floating with their crews missing. No useful clues have been recovered from these derelict ships.
- “The Changing Island” is so-named because those who pass by it have given a number of conflicting descriptions of it. Some say that the island is nothing but bare stone, featuring terraces of sharp, angular rock in white, red, black, and bronze. Others have talked of the island appearing as a pleasant green atoll of palm trees and plant life, with sandy beaches.

- Most disturbingly, some witnesses have described the island as covered with bodies, as if the place were the site of some terrible battle. A large number of the fallen appeared to be armored soldiers of various races, but most were as naked as the day they were born.

In addition to the well-known lore above, the following information can be discovered by adventurers who research the island while in port. The manner of research is up to you, but might involve Intelligence (Investigation) checks, talking to background contacts, use of the *legend lore* spell, and so forth. Not all the rumors the characters hear will be true. False rumors, or elements of larger rumors that are false, are *italicized* below.

- The island sometimes submerges and rises again. *The crew of one ship saw a giant eyestalk rise out of the water. The island is nothing less than a giant monster!*
- A sailor who fell into the black water was struck dumb in an instant. Even after being hauled out, their mind was like a child's, leaving them not knowing their own name and barely able to speak.
- Monstrous creatures were seen on the island—some sort of two-legged half-dragons with icy white skin and bat wings. They ran to the waterline and howled at the terrified sailors passing by, but didn't take flight to pursue them.
- Not only is the island covered with the dead, *but those dead periodically rise to walk about and reach out to passing ships. There must be thousands of zombies there!*
- A seagull was seen to land on the island to peck at the dead bodies there. It was killed by a tentacle that seemed to grow out of the fog, grabbing the bird and tearing it apart!
- A mighty drow galley was seen in the waters near the island. *Whispered rumors talk of the island as channeling some kind of demonic power, drawing the dark elves from their underground lairs.*
- A mysterious ship carrying those strange shadow-loving folk, the shadar-kai, was seen in the waters near the island.
- *The island is covered with great heaps of glittering jewels!*
- A smoking crater rises at the center of the island. While sailors watched, it blasted out an eruption—not of lava, but of what looked like the bodies of the dead!
- Three days before the island and the black water appeared, a lone fisher reported hearing a great thunderclap and seeing an enormous cube of rock fall from the heavens. Red flames and black smoke followed its passing, as did a shrieking like the voices of a thousand fiends. The fiery cube fell into the sea and disappeared.

RESCUE MISSION

The characters enter the adventure when they are tasked with finding a mage who has vanished while exploring the island. This character might be an old NPC acquaintance of one of the other characters, or

the party could be hired by others who want the mage located and returned.

Sladek is a neutral good genasi **mage** called “Sladek the Blue” for his blue skin and dark blue robes. Local folk know that the mage is fascinated by geology and geography, and that he hired a small boat with six sailors and went to investigate the new island a week before. He and the sailors have not been seen since.

When Sladek ventured onto the island, he was captured by pixelated guards and converted into a pixelated creature. He now serves as Vargo the skull lord’s second-in-command. The sailors were either captured and converted to pixelated creatures or killed by the hydroloths guarding the island, who also tore the ship apart.

If the characters don’t know Sladek, they are hired by the mage’s order to determine what happened to him. Such organizations might include the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors if the adventure starts in Waterdeep, the Cowled Wizards of Amn if it starts in Ioma, or the Zhentarim in any starting point location.

A servant of the order approaches the characters—Saberhagen, a low-level neutral **diviner** whose green robes match his short, dyed beard. On behalf of his order, Saberhagen offers the characters 5,000 gp each if they can rescue Sladek and return his possessions, or 3,000 gp each to bring back his possessions and his body.

IOUN STONES

Chief among Sladek’s possessions—and a big part of why his order wants those possessions returned—is his collection of six *Ioun stones*:

- Awareness (dark blue rhomboid): Wielder cannot be surprised
- Insight (incandescent blue sphere): Wisdom increases by 2
- Intellect (scarlet and blue sphere): Intelligence increases by 2
- Mastery (pale green prism): Proficiency bonus increases by 1
- Protection (dusty rose prism): Gain a +1 bonus to AC
- Reserve (vibrant purple prism): Store up to 3 levels of spells

See chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for more information on *Ioun stones*.

When Sladek was pixelated, his *Ioun stones* were claimed by Vargo the skull lord. Saberhagen gives the characters three *spell scrolls* of *locate object* they can use to track the *Ioun stones* once they get to the island. When the characters use the scrolls, the position of the stones seems to shift as the skull lord moves around within the cube.

Naturally, if the characters do defeat Vargo and claim the *Ioun stones*, whether or not to return them for the reward is up to them.

GETTING TO THE ISLAND

When the characters are ready to travel to the island, they can buy a ship, use their own ship if they have one already, or ask Saberhagen to hire a ship for

them. If they ask for sailors who can fight, the ship includes twenty **guards** (neutral mercenaries). The mercenaries take their orders from any character with the soldier background. In the absence of such a character, they follow the orders of the character with the highest Charisma.

MAD MONODRONE

While the characters make their preparations for the journey to the Changing Island, a portside contact introduces them to an odd creature found by fishers in the waters off the island: a spherical, seemingly mechanical being with a single huge eye, and spindly wings and limbs. Any character with experience of planar travel recognizes the creature as a **monodrone**. Recognizing the creature otherwise requires a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The only survivor of the modron strike force, the monodrone has lost its connection to Mechanus, and is now a rogue modron stranded on the Material Plane. It knows about the Archquadrone, the yugoloths, the battles that took place on the cube, and the effects of the Styx sea. It doesn’t know about Vargo, Avnas, or any of the recent visitors to the cube (including the drow, the balhannoth, and the shadar-kai).

How much of that information it can tell the characters is another matter, as the monodrone has a toddler’s intelligence and can speak only forty-eight words (see the table below). It cannot count above six, and describes any larger numbers as “six six” or “six six six.” Thankfully, its time on the Material Plane means that the creature has learned to speak those words in Common as well as Modron.

Bad	Good	Soft
Hard	Up	Down
One	Two	Three
Four	Five	Six
Go	Stay	Get
Drop	Give	Put
Boss	Break	Work
Near	Far	Circle
Life	Death	Point
Part	Whole	Lamp
Line	Face	Triangle
Square	Pentagon	Hexagon
Friend	Enemy	Fix
Ear	Resources	Department
Big	Small	Wet
Dry	Eye	Mouth

The monodrone’s mind is so alien that its thoughts cannot be read by magic, and it is immune to being charmed. But it is clearly panicked as it babbles about the “Six Face Bad,” “Bad Square,” and “Bad Boss.” The creature is terrified of the island and doesn’t want to return. However, its need to be part of an order inspires it to instinctively seek a new “boss,” and it quickly latches onto one of the characters in this role. The monodrone becomes a loyal companion and goes wherever its boss goes. However, once it gets to the

island, it is exposed to the pixelating curse just as the characters are, and might begin to transform.

The monodrone has no name, but it answers to a name given to it by its boss. This is the only word it can speak in addition to its base forty-eight words.

JOURNEY TO THE ISLAND

Sailing for the mysterious Changing Island gives the characters their first glimpse of its mysteries—and its dangers.

THE CHANGING ISLAND

As the characters come within sight of the island, roll a d6. This determines what face of the island is up when they approach, and what the characters see.

Five sides of the island-cube—**faces 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6**—feature a barren, rocky landscape of strangely geometrical terraces in various colors. These terraces are built up of square and rectangular lumps of gray, brown, black, and red stone or clay, though some areas glitter as if lumps of bronze are buried in the ground. The thick fog gives the surface an eerie, twilight look.

By contrast, **face 5** of the cube is a lush green jungle island of palm trees and banana plants. Here, sea waves crash against gentle, sandy beaches, and the fog that covers the island seems less oppressive. (In reality, dead bodies cover this face as they do all other faces of the cube, but they are transformed by the power of the creature that creates this delightful vista. See face 5 for more information.)

No matter which face is on the surface, the island is some 600 feet wide. Circumnavigating the island takes 10 minutes, and confirms that it is almost perfectly square except for a few rocky reefs (or sandbars, if face 5 is up) that jut out into the water at irregular intervals. In addition to the fog, rising hills (and trees if face 5 is up) make it impossible to see all the way across the island without going ashore.

Flying characters can travel above the island and see all of its current face from the air. However, any creature that lands on the island and takes off again is attacked by **vampiric mists** that lurk in the fog. See “Mysterious Fog,” below, and see *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes* for more information about the vampiric mist.

Characters who don’t want to risk contact with the black water surrounding the island can use teleportation magic to reach the island safely, and can use such magic on or within the cube. However, the cube’s infernal magic prevents creatures from leaving the island by the use of such magic without the permission of the cube’s ruler, Earl Andromalius—which permission cannot be granted, as Andromalius is dead.

While anywhere within the cube or within 30 feet of its exterior surfaces, a character who attempts to use any teleportation or planar travel magic (including the *plane shift* spell) to leave the cube realizes before the magic is used that it will not work. (A character who persists in trying to use such magic anyway expends its use or wastes a spell slot with no effect.) If the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) is destroyed, this effect ends.

Regardless of which face of the island is up when the characters approach, they also see a derelict drow galleon floating several hundred feet away from it. If face 1 or face 2 is up, they see the ship of the ill-fated shadar-kai expedition as well. Countless other bits of timber and floating debris from scuttled ships float around the island, but none are big enough to conclusively identify.

WHAT THE ISLAND TRULY IS

In its true form, the island is a cubical battle station from the plane of Acheron, floating in the Styx sea with only a small portion visible above the surface, like an iceberg. Its form is an iron cube 600 feet on a side, with one to six hatch-like entrances on each face of the cube. The visible face of the cube shows marks of battle: gouges, sections melted from intense heat, and indentations from battering blows. Each face has its own local gravity, though the characters will need to explore to learn this.

The stone terraces of the island are not an illusion. Rather, they are a magical transformation fueled by the pixelating curse. In truth, the surface of each face of the cube is covered with piles of pixelated dead—warriors of various humanoid species, many bearing weapons and armor. Held fast by the local gravity of each face, these are the soldiers of Acheron, including those who were killed by yugoloths when the cube was purged.

Any creature that has the truesight ability, is under the effect of a *true seeing* spell or similar magic, or wears *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) can see the island as it truly is. A *dispel magic* or *remove curse* spell also eliminates the pixelating curse from a 10-foot radius of its false surface for 10 minutes, revealing the true form of the pixelated dead. Those dead are piled to heights of 30 feet in some places, with intermittent valleys between those piles revealing the surface of the cube beneath them.

Characters who set foot on the island without seeing its true form have the disturbing experience of touching what looks like dirt and stone but is actually cubical metal, bone, and flesh. Thinking they are walking on rock or clay, they may not realize they are actually walking on pixelated bodies.

Countless dead cover the cube when the characters arrive, and more are shot out onto the surface every hour. Most are warriors who fell during the yugoloth assault, but the broken soul tap (area 6.14) has also caused a steady stream of new dead to appear inside the cube. Gathered by the pixelated hellfire engine at area 6.41, they are regularly expelled onto the surface of face 1, whereupon the bronze scouts of face 2 drag the bodies around in a futile attempt to inter them, which ultimately distributes them across the surface of the cube. (The hellfire engine and the bronze scout appear in *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes*.)

THE PIXELATING CURSE

When any creature has been on the surface of the Changing Island for 10 minutes, and then each time it finishes a short or long rest while on or within the cube, it must attempt a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature is infected with the

pixelating curse. Advantage on saving throws against magical effects applies, and chaotic creatures also have advantage on this save. Creatures that are immune to disease are immune to the curse.

The pixelating curse combines aspects of a traditional magical curse and a disease, and has both physical and mental components. If a creature is infected, the transmutation magic of the curse registers within them with a *detect magic* spell. The curse can be negated with a *cure disease*, *dispel magic*, *lesser restoration*, or *greater restoration* spell. Exposure to Styx water also ends the curse, including being fully immersed in the Styx sea or being doused by a bucket of Styx water. Once cured, though, a creature must leave the island within 10 minutes or make another Constitution save against becoming reinfected.

Once a creature has reached mental level 3 of the curse (see below), it no longer wants to be cured, and resists any attempts to cure it if it is conscious. To end the curse with one of the spells above, a spellcaster must succeed on an ability check using their spellcasting modifier, against a DC equal to 10 + the creature's Intelligence modifier. On a failed check, the creature remains pixelated and the spell is wasted.

The curse affects objects as well as living things. The effect on objects in a creature's possession is determined by the rate at which the creature is pixelating. Unattended objects (including things such as tents or gear left on the island while the characters explore) become pixelated within 1 hour. At your discretion, characters might need to attempt Wisdom (Perception) checks to recognize pixelated objects when they return to them. Magic items are not affected by the pixelating curse.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

A creature under the effect of the pixelating curse slowly transforms into a 'blocky' version of itself, becoming more pixelated with each level of the curse's progression. Once infected, a creature gains one additional physical level of the curse at the end of each short rest. It gains two additional physical levels of the curse at the end of each long rest.

- **Physical Level 1:** No outwardly visible effects.
- **Physical Level 2:** Each pixel is smaller than a grain of rice. The effect is subtle enough that others might not notice unless the creature under the curse's effect is touched or closely inspected. Otherwise, an observer notices the effect only with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check.
- **Physical Level 3:** Each pixel is the size of a small pearl. The curse is clearly visible to all observers.
- **Physical Level 4:** Each pixel is the size of a grape.
- **Physical Level 5:** Each pixel is the size of a strawberry.
- **Physical Level 6:** Each pixel is the size of a small apple. Once a creature has taken 6 physical levels of the curse, it gains the pixelated template (see below).

When a creature is first infected by the pixelating curse, roll a d6. On an odd result, it becomes infected from the inside out instead of outside in. The creature

NPCs AND THE CURSE

If the characters bring large numbers of mercenaries or other NPCs with them onto the island, you can choose to not roll saving throws for those characters. Rather, simply decide how the curse progresses through the ranks in whatever way seems most entertaining.

seems outwardly normal through the first 5 levels of the curse's physical progression, making it impossible to notice visually. However, if the creature is wounded by a piercing or slashing weapon, it bleeds red pixels of the appropriate size instead of blood.

MENTAL EFFECTS

Pixelated creatures are all linked into a group mind that regulates their behavior. Upon becoming infected, and each time it gains another physical level of the curse, a creature must attempt a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. Chaotic creatures have advantage on this save. On a failure, the creature gains 1 mental level of the curse. Because progression through the mental levels of the curse depend on progression through the physical levels, it's possible for an infected creature to be fully physically transformed but still retain its self-identity, or to appear only partially pixelated but be totally under the curse's mental control.

- **Mental Level 1:** The creature rolls once on the Mental Pixelation table. Additionally, it begins to suffer from hallucinations. To the infected creature, pixelated creatures and objects start to appear normal, while uninfected creatures and objects begin to appear as melting, chaotic, shapeless forms. If some of the characters are infected and some are not, players might have fun roleplaying whose perspective is real.
- **Mental Level 2:** The creature rolls for a second effect on the Mental Pixelation table, in addition to the original effect. Reroll if the original effect is rolled again.
- **Mental Level 3:** The creature's mind completely succumbs to the curse. Its alignment changes to lawful neutral and it suffers all the effects of the Mental Pixelation table simultaneously. In the case of a conflict, higher-numbered effects supersede lower-numbered ones. The creature also refuses to acknowledge that it is cursed, and does not willingly allow its own curse to be removed or help others remove the curse on themselves.

A creature at mental level 3 of the curse begins receiving weak telepathic transmissions from other pixelated creatures. While within 120 feet of another pixelated creature, the first creature can fully understand the transmissions, and is informed that the Archquadrone is their god, and that the skull lord and the pixelated mage are its divinely appointed representatives.

MENTAL PIXELATION

As noted on the Mental Pixelation table on the following page, the mental effects of the pixelating curse twist (or, rather, straighten) the cursed creature's mind toward absolute law. Though it retains its memories, the creature adopts lawful, conformist

behavior that supersedes its original personality. Players should be encouraged to roleplay cursed characters as stereotypical robots and “pod people,” as members of a fanatical cult, or as enthusiastic 1950s suburbanites.

Animals and other creatures of minimal intelligence that succumb to these effects might have them altered to better reflect instinct than intellect, as you determine.

TEMPLATE: PIXELATED

A pixelated creature resembles a crude outline of its original form, composed of individual blocks about

MENTAL PIXELATION

d10	Effect
1	The creature becomes obsessed with monetary value. At every opportunity, it must speculate on the cost in gold pieces of items that it, its companions, and its enemies are carrying.
2	The creature becomes obsessed with assessing weights. At every opportunity, it must speculate on the weight of items that it, its companions, and its enemies are carrying.
3	The creature becomes obsessed with measuring distances. At every opportunity, it must comment on the dimensions of objects, the range or reach of attacks, and so on.
4	The creature becomes obsessed with having a “normal” appearance. It sheds or stores away any unique garments and gear, trying to adopt the average look of most members of the party.
5	The creature becomes obsessed with its speech and mannerisms conforming to established norms. It loses any personal flourishes to its interactions with others, and might adopt the mannerisms of other characters in an attempt to blend in.
6	The creature becomes obsessed with logic and shuns emotional engagement. It focuses on the desire to work, the satisfaction of a job well done, and suspicion of others that look or think differently.
7	The creature develops a distaste of curved things, and avoids their use if possible (for example, stowing a bow or axe in order to attack with a sword).
8	The creature begins to hear happy voices promising a better way of life. (These are glimmers of the telepathy that all pixelated creatures share.)
9	The creature becomes obsessed with hierarchy and social authority. A character with the noble or soldier background might demand respect from allies and enemies. Other characters might speak respectfully of authority figures and become meek in their presence. (This mental effect culminates in the creature recognizing the skull lord as its master.)
10	The creature becomes a religious fanatic if it was already pious, or it becomes a militant atheist if not. When the creature meets the skull lord or sees the Archquadrone, it abandons its former faith (or lack thereof) to worship the Archquadrone as a god.

the size of a small apple. Pixelated creatures have their facial features (including eyes), fingers, toes, and teeth lost in the mass of blocks, although they retain their senses and their ability to eat, drink and speak. Pixelated creatures rarely talk, however, preferring to communicate with one another telepathically.

Pixelated natural attacks and weapons retain any ability to pierce and slash, even though they appear to be blunt and cubical.

Intelligent pixelated creatures seek out the skull lord and the Archquadrone, seeking to serve it as soldiers and stewards in an instinctive hierarchy. Animals and other creatures of minimal intelligence continue to behave normally, following their own instincts. But they defend any pixelated creature they see being attacked by an unpixelated one.

A pixelated creature has the following traits.

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

As with all creatures under the effect of the pixelating curse, being immersed in the Styx sea instantly changes a pixelated creature back to normal. A small splash of the black water causes a pixelated creature distress but has no other effect. Being doused by a full bucket of Styx water will cause one Medium or smaller creature to revert. Treat throwing a bucket of water as a weapon attack (range 5/15), with advantage if the bucket is wielded two-handed.

A Large or larger pixelated creature struck with a bucket of Styx water can attempt a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw to resist changing back. Such creatures require multiple buckets of Styx water to change back, as you determine.

THE STYX SEA

As the characters draw closer, the first sign they see of their destination is a low bank of fog obscuring a small, flat island in the distance.

They then see the change in the water. The relatively clear, blue-green water of the sea meets a current of silty black liquid, which doesn’t mix with the seawater. The black water surrounds the island to a distance of a quarter mile on all sides. It is fresh water, although it has a strange smell reminiscent of alchemy and sweet perfume. Colder than the surrounding sea, it is also noticeably chilly to the touch.

A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature) check indicates that the water is more like river water than seawater. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Religion) check recognizes the water’s scent as similar to cassia (a spice that smells like cinnamon), natron (mineral salts), and bitumen (tar)—three ingredients that are used together in some cultures to mummify the dead. If the Intelligence (Religion) check result is 25 or higher, the character is reminded of old legends of the River Styx—the cold, dark river of the Lower Planes in which the memories of the dead are washed away.

The dark water surrounding the island is a transplanted portion of the River Styx, ritually summoned by the now-dead merrenloth commander of the yugoloth strike team as a way to quarantine the island. The Styx sea is weaker than the pure River Styx, but it still radiates evil and magic. Small quantities of holy water poured upon it instantly turn to steam and evaporate.

A creature that is lightly splashed by or exposed to the water suffers no ill effects. But any creature other than a fiend, a construct, or a plant creature that is immersed in the water or that drinks it must attempt a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw. With a success, the creature feels a dark, sleepy sensation that threatens to pull its memories away but quickly fades. On a failed save, the creature's Intelligence and Charisma scores become 5 (if they were not already lower) and it loses all memories of its life. At the same time, all curses, diseases, and magical effects currently in effect upon the creature (including the pixelating curse) are ended.

A character who falls victim to the Styx sea's effects takes on the mentality of a young, meek child. They can speak haltingly, but they have total amnesia and cannot recognize their friends—and might even forget the function of common objects. If attacked, a victim's muscle memory kicks in and they are able to defend themselves with weapons. But a victim of the Styx sea cannot cast spells, concentrate on spells or other effects, use class features, employ magic items, or undertake any other complex action, at your determination.

A *greater restoration* spell restores a victim's ability scores and memory. Failing that, a victim's Intelligence and Charisma go up by 2 points at the end of each long rest, until their original scores are regained. As a victim regains its ability scores, it gradually regains its memories and features as well, with the amnesia ending when the creature's ability scores are restored to normal.

INVISIBLE GUARDIANS

Three **hydroloths**^M lurk invisibly in the Styx sea, guarding the island so that no creatures leave it that might spread the **pixelating curse**. Any character who succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check while scanning the black water can see the telltale ripples of large shapes moving therein. If the check result is 25 or higher, the observer makes out three invisible shapes that are human-sized and that swim more like giant frogs than fish—and that slowly move to intercept the characters' ship.

The hydroloths were ordered to guard the island by their commanders—the oinoloth and the late merrenloth that went onto face 5 of the cube with a force of other hydroloths and never returned. They know that the oinoloth must still be alive because they've seen the vampiric mists drifting through the fog that covers the island (see the *censer of blood* in the "New Magic Items" appendix). However, they have no idea as to the other yugoloths' fate.

If a ship observes the island from a distance, the hydroloths watch but leave it alone. Only if a ship



HYDROLOTH

makes a close approach or a creature flies or teleports from the ship to the island do they react, attempting to scuttle the ship if it touches the island, or boarding it, killing the crew, and leaving it adrift if it doesn't. The hydroloths won't pursue creatures onto the cube. They know from experience that touching the cube for a short period probably won't pixelate them, but they're scared to risk it.

If the characters don't flee at once, the hydroloths use their telepathy to communicate with them, recognizing that powerful adventurers might be of use to them. The fiends can explain the fog (see below), the pixelating curse, the Styx sea, and the outer workings of the island—in exchange for a promise that the characters will try to locate and aid any surviving yugoloths currently within the cube.

The hydroloths make whatever slippery promises they can in an attempt to win the characters' assistance, though they have no intention of keeping those promises. However, they can share other useful intelligence, including that the yugoloth strike team went ashore on the beautiful island (face 5), and that the fiends carried a number of valuable magic items the characters are welcome to if their owners have met their end. (They don't bother telling the characters that the oinoloth will ultimately claim all such treasures for itself, killing the characters once the rescue is done.)

DERELICT DROW GALLEY

Not far from the island, an abandoned drow galley—a black and lavender trireme once rowed by chained slaves—floats aimlessly through the fog. The ship is built on four levels: the main deck (exposed to the weather), the cannon deck (where the main cabins are located), the rowers' deck, and the cargo hold. Its three banks of oars suggest that the huge ship should have a crew of over one hundred. But there is no sign of motion

on the deck, the sails are torn, and numerous oars have been shattered.

Characters who approach to within 30 feet of the ship become suddenly aware of the telepathic presence of other creatures. Three entities contact three individual characters, crying out in rage as they demand to be freed from something. The characters can respond to the pleas, but the nature of telepathic communications gives them no hint that these creatures are three bulezau demons. Likewise, the demons keep that information to themselves as they plead for the characters' aid. The bulezaus are imprisoned in a magic pentagram in a cabin on the ship's cannon deck. See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for details of the bulezau.

FATE OF THE DROW

The ship was captained by a drow named Simak, who used the advice of a drow oracle to seek out a "great weapon" that had fallen to the Material Plane from Acheron. After determining the dangers of the Styx sea when one crew member lost his memory after being exposed to the black water, a drow force went ashore on face 4 of the island under command of Simak and a high priestess, leaving guards and galley slaves behind.

The landing party were all promptly killed or captured by the skull lord's forces. Vargo tried to take the high priestess's skull, but failed when she killed herself first. Meanwhile, the drow forces and galley slaves on the ship were killed by the hydroloths. Simak, the last survivor of the drow expedition, escaped death at Vargo's hands by pretending to be under the effects of the Styx sea, and now lives in the complex under face 6, desperately plotting her escape.

MAIN DECK

This deck holds the ship's two masts, a small empty forecabin and aftcabin, and three sets of stairs leading down open hatches into the decks below. The whole deck is strewn with the gory remnants of a battle: bloodstains (drow, killed by the hydroloths), scattered weapons, some stained with a foul ichor (the hydroloths' blood), and piles of mingled hydroloth vomit and drow bones. A close investigation discerns the bodies of ten to twenty individual drow. The prints of huge frog-like creatures (the hydroloths) cover the deck.

Between the central hatch and the starboard rail, the ship's fungus-wood timbers are damaged and streaked with foul-smelling slime. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check determines that some large creature crawled out of the hatch and went overboard. (This was the balhannoth, currently on face 5 of the cube).

The bulezaus' telepathy has a range of 60 feet, and can be heard from anywhere on the ship.

CANNON DECK

The cannon deck consists of a set of cabins to aft and a large open area containing sixteen cannons (see "Siege Equipment" in chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). The iron cannons are carved with spiders, demons, and gargoyles.

In the aft cannon deck, beyond a short corridor, are the cabins of the captain, the first mate, and the high

priestess of Lolth. One wall of the corridor features what appears to be a thick growth of fungus. In truth, this is an alkilith demon grown from spores released when the ship was abandoned. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for details of the alkilith.)

Fiendish Ambush. The **alkilith** resembles a fungal growth eating into the wood of the ship. It is visually indistinguishable from a slime or fungus, but its fiendish nature can be noted with a *detect evil and good* spell or similar ability, and it responds if attacked. If its true nature is not revealed, the alkilith waits for the characters to get close so that its Foment Madness can confuse at least one of them. It then attacks at will.

First Mate's Cabin. These utilitarian sailor's quarters contain nothing of value.

High Priestess's Cabin. A rotten stench is noticed by anyone approaching the door to this area. The finely furnished room is decorated with black and red spider-silk tapestries (1,000 gp). On the floor is a large chalk pentagram in which three hungry **bulezaus**^M are imprisoned.

Summoned just before the drow went to the island—then forgotten here when the ship was attacked by the hydroloths—the bulezaus cannot escape unless the chalk pentagram is broken from outside. When they see the characters, their telepathic demands for aid become more agitated. The demons make any promises to secure their escape, but they immediately break those oaths and try to eat their rescuers if freed. Any character proficient in the Arcana skill knows that attacking the bulezaus from outside the pentagram will break its magic and release them.

Even if the pentagram isn't broken, the characters are still subject to the bulezaus' Rotting Presence feature. It takes 5 rounds under the effects of Rotting Presence to fully search the cabin for the treasure found here—a pouch holding thirty-two bloodstone, onyx, and sardonyx gems (50 gp each); various ritual devices and candles (100 gp); a *+3 dagger*; and a *cloak of the bat*.

Captain's Cabin. Decorated in white and cream puffball colors with coral-like fungus candelabra, this area contains the ship's charts and the captain's log (written in Elvish). The charts show that the ship originated in the Underdark, traveling to the sea by way of secret underground rivers. They are worth 500 gp to a sage or a well-heeled Underdark explorer.

The log identifies the ship's commander as Simak, the head of a minor drow noble house. Two weeks earlier, a drow oracle told her that a great weapon had fallen out of Acheron, crashing from the Nine Hells to the Material Plane. The weapon is described as a giant battle station—a flying fortress of immense power with cannons that can destroy cities. Simak quickly gathered a secret expedition to find this weapon, seeking to increase the glory of her house. The last entry in the log identifies this mysterious weapon as the island, confirming that it had been sighted, and that the crew were planning to go ashore.

The cabin also contains a *+1 shortsword*, a *potion of vitality*, 800 gp, and a collection of fine spider-shell dishware worth 1,200 gp.

ROWER'S DECK

The bodies of over a hundred unfortunate human, kuo-toa, and myconid galley slaves are still chained to rows of filthy benches, where they were killed by the hydroloths. Near the central hatch, the bodies have been dismembered in gruesome and imaginative ways. Toward the edges of the fray, they are each killed with a single blow to the head or chest, as if whoever massacred them began to grow bored.

CARGO HOLD

A rank smell fills this area, and can be noted by characters as they descend the stairs. The hold contains barrels of food, fresh water, and fungus wine, along with nonmagical weapons and armor, rope, sailcloth, glowing fungus lamps, and other supplies.

In the center of the hold is a great 10-foot-by-10-foot iron cage, empty and seemingly melted open. Foul-smelling lavender slime sticks to the bars of the cage, and drips along a trail of damaged floorboards leading to the stairs below the main hatch. Iron amulets bearing the mark of Lolth are bolted to the sides of the cage. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check recognizes them as wards against transmutation, though their magic has failed. The cage once contained Simak's 'pet'—a balhannoth that escaped to the island after the rest of the crew was killed, and which now lairs on face 5.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

If the characters drop a line or an anchor to test the depth of the water near the island, they don't find bottom. The island seems to rise vertically out of the depths like a plateau, giving no sign that it's floating. Its edges are like a short cliff that rises out of the water, but any character who inspects the edge or has a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 15 or higher notes something disturbing.

Where the dark waves crash against the cliff, an irregularity appears in the stone, with the rectangular terraces seeming to break down into something like mangrove roots or coral. Getting close enough for a careful inspection reveals what those 'roots' truly are—uncountable close-stacked bodies that are piled over one another as they disappear into the black depths.

This grotesque vision appears because the black Styx water dispels the pixelating curse. Where the upper surface of the cube is exposed to air, it is pixelated. Where the other faces are under the Styx sea, they return to their original form of iron covered by the fallen dead.

RANDOM ISLAND MISHAPS

All the ground on the island is difficult terrain. For each 10 minutes that a character spends walking around, they must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, roll a d6 to determine the outcome.

1—Spike Step. The character impales their foot on something that looks like a three-foot-long spike of shining gray shale, which deals 3 (1d6) piercing damage and breaks away from the ground. The spike is a longsword. Close examination shows that despite

appearing to be made of cubes, the spike's tip and sides are extremely sharp.

2—Unexpected Fall. The character falls down a previously unseen hole and is trapped by something that feels like thick roots. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, the character realizes that the roots are the cold, clammy arms and legs of the dead. The character is restrained, but can escape or be lifted out with a successful DC 12 Strength (Athletics) check.

3—Slippery Slope. A chunk of hillside collapses under the character, who falls prone and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage. The ground breaks apart into six-foot-long, log-like chunks—a number of bodies that roll downhill before coming to a stop.

4—Cubed Loot. The character trips across a gray metallic object that separates itself from the ground and can be picked up. If the characters wash the object in the Styx sea or see it through *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix), roll a d6 to see what it is:

d6	Object
1	A silver bracelet worth 75 gp
2	A small platinum idol of Bhaal worth 300 gp
3	A silver-plated githyanki hand worth 200 gp, and which can be used to open the locks of the doors into and inside the cube (see "Exterior Doors")
4	A silver medallion worth 125 gp
5	A figurine of wondrous power—silver raven
6	A cursed amulet resembling a medusa's face. The amulet petrifies any creature within 30 feet of it that looks at it, as if the creature were targeted by a <i>flesh to stone</i> spell (save DC 15). The amulet has AC 15 and 10 hit points. If it is broken, any creatures it has petrified or restrained have those conditions ended.

5—Foul Slime. The character steps into something soft, releasing black pixelated slime and a foul smell. The character and all other creatures within 10 feet of them must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute or until they intentionally vomit as an action.

6—Armor Pile. A character slips on an area of metallic gray cubes, rectangles, and tubes (a pile of weapons and armor stripped from the dead). The character falls prone and takes 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

MYSTERIOUS FOG

The eerie fog that surrounds the island rises 100 feet above the water and extends 1,000 feet across. The area of the fog is lightly obscured, and it has a red tinge in places. Creatures that suffer negative effects in sunlight ignore those effects on the surface of the island while the fog is present.

A successful DC 10 Intelligence (Nature) check confirms that the fog is supernatural in origin, though it creates no ill effects. But the fog hides a deadly threat in the form of the red-tinged areas within it, which manifest in response to any creature that first sets foot on the island, then flies while on its surface. The first creature to do so is attacked by seven **vampiric mists**^M created by the oinloth's *censer of blood* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix). One mist attacks the first

round, followed by two the second round, and four on the third round until all the mists are engaged.

The oinoloth's orders to the mists were to destroy any creature that tries to fly away from the island. If a flying creature returns to the surface, the vampiric mists stop attacking, hovering above the creature for a few moments before returning to the fog.

If any of the vampiric mists are destroyed, they don't refresh. Only the *censer of blood* can create more.

A flying character who explores near the center of the fog notices that it appears to thicken at that center, congealing into a strange, disc-like black shape roughly 6 feet in diameter, hanging 50 feet above the island. The disc feels soft to the touch and can be grabbed. A strong yank pulls it out of the air and into the character's hands, causing the fog to instantly dissipate. If this happens by day, sunlight shines upon the island, causing the deaths of any remaining vampiric mists within 3 rounds. The disc is the *handkerchief of darkness* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix).

BODIES REVEALED

The actions of the skull lord and other creatures within the floating cube cause it to periodically rotate, exposing new faces of the island while dunking others. When this happens, the freshly exposed face initially appears covered with the dead. But as the Styx water that soaks the bodies evaporates, the curse seeps out of the cube to gradually transform the dead into the pixelated terraces. The full conversion takes about 4 hours, during which time the in-transition terraces slowly lose the appearance of the bodies they truly are.

While fully under the effect of the curse, the features of the bodies can't be discerned, but they retain their true texture—bronze, iron, bone, and flesh, reshaped into perfect cubes. Walking over the island is an awkward and disturbing task, as the 'ground' slips around in large discrete chunks (bodies tumbling about) and randomly changes texture from hard and metallic to soft and squishy.

Submerging the bodies or their gear in the Styx sea unpixelates them. But unless they are immediately removed from the island, the dead quickly become reinfected, showing signs of pixelation within 10 minutes and becoming completely repixelated within 1 hour.

The bodies show no signs of being nibbled by fish (which are repelled by the Styx sea) or gulls (which have been attacked by the vampiric mists and now give the island a wide berth). Though the dead are uniformly gray and cold, they are not currently rotting, as the Styx sea both preserves them and covers up their smell. A successful DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check allows a character to sniff out the cloaked smell of slow decay.

SEARCHING THE BODIES

Searching the bodies is effectively impossible when they are pixelated. Unless a character is completely pixelated or wearing *pixel glasses*, the bodies are a mosaic of rock, metal, and cold squishy substances with occasional detachable metallic cubes or rectangles.

The bodies can be easily searched while submerged (though doing so brings characters into contact with the Styx sea), or when they have freshly risen from the water. Once exposed to the air, a body repixelates slowly over 4 hours.

The majority of the bodies are human, though occasional duergar, gnomes, dragonborn, and hobgoblins are found among them. All are adults, and represent countless peoples and cultures (including many from remote portions of the multiverse, which the characters won't recognize). Most are naked, while others bear weapons and wear the armor of foot soldiers. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Medicine) check, a character discerns that though the armored bodies show signs of having died in battle, the naked bodies appear to have died from massive blunt trauma such as a high fall. Moreover, the bodies that have died from falling have not been dead as long as the warriors—including many bodies that look fresh.

If the characters want to search the bodies for valuables, let each character attempt a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. On a success, the character finds some object of value, as you determine.

If the characters use *speak with dead* to talk to any of the bodies, what they learn depends on whether they interrogate a naked or armored body. The armored warriors remember being soldiers of Acheron, serving in Cube 1717 under Earl Andromalius, and then being overwhelmed by the pixelating curse and killed by yugoloths. The naked dead have no memories other than appearing in the soul tap in area 6.14 and falling to their deaths.

A FAMILIAR FACE

If the characters search the bodies long enough, have one character notice a disturbingly familiar body: an exact duplicate of an evil enemy the party fought and killed in the past. The dead enemy is recognizable by their facial features, but is wearing new armor and wielding new weapons. Any death wounds the characters remember having dealt to the enemy are gone, with new fatal wounds taking their place.

This fallen warrior is the same enemy the characters killed, reborn in Acheron after death to fight eternal battles for the lords of that plane. Caught in the pixelating curse, the villain then died again in the battle with the yugoloths.

RANDOM SURFACE ENCOUNTERS

Each time the characters arrive on a new face of the cube (including when they first come to the island), each time they finish a short or long rest on the surface of the island, or whenever they spend 1 hour or more exploring the surface, roll a d6. On a roll of 1, use the table below to determine what the characters encounter. All these creatures appear in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*.

If the characters are on face 5, ignore all results except 1 or 2. The cadaver collector is strong enough to pass across that face without fear of its residents, and the berbalang has authority over those residents. The other creatures of the cube avoid the beautiful island.

d6	Encounter
1–2	1 cadaver collector
3	1 berbalang
4	1 derro savant and 1 gray render
5	1d3 + 1 white abishai
6	1d4 + 2 bronze scouts

Cadaver Collector. Having survived the fall from Acheron, a **cadaver collector**^M now roams the surface of the cube looking for victims. Unaffected by the Styx sea, this deadly construct emerges from the water to look for prey, then reenters the water after crossing the upper face of the cube. Constantly passing through the water has left the cadaver collector and its load of bodies unpixelated, though it might gather pixelated dead to add to its collection while the characters watch. It attacks any creatures on the cube's surface, but won't pursue prey through the doors.

Berbalang. Bunch the **berbalang**^M (unpixelated; see area 6.13) goes to the surface to scavenge skulls and bones. It ignores the characters unless forced to talk to them, and runs for the nearest door if attacked.

Derro Savant and Gray Render. Avnas the **derro savant**^M and her faithful pixelated **gray render**^M, Moxon, are searching the dead for magic and trinkets she might use in her work. See area 6.17 for more information.

White Abishai. This group is on an expedition from the temple of Tiamat (area 6.38), looking for a way off the island or for potential sacrifices. The **white abishai**^M attempt to capture the characters' ship if they can, or to knock the characters unconscious and drag them back to be sacrificed to their goddess.

Bronze Scouts. The **bronze scouts**^M from face 2 wander over and around the unfortunate dead, attempting to lay them to rest according to their programming, but stymied by their sheer numbers. They approach to within 5 feet of the characters to inspect them, but do not attack unless attacked first. Roll a d6 each time the bronze scouts appear. On 1–3, they are pixelated. On 4–6, they are unpixelated, having just emerged from one of the cube faces presently underwater.

PERMANENT LOSSES

If the berbalang, the derro, the gray render, or any abishai are permanently killed, remove them from their home locations. The cadaver collector has no permanent home, but is also not replaced if destroyed. Only the bronze scouts can reappear indefinitely.

WHEN THE CUBE ROLLS

In addition to the chance for random encounters, whenever the characters finish a short or long rest on the surface of the island or spend 1 hour or more there, have one player roll a d20. On a 10 or less, the cube suddenly begins to move as if roiled by an earthquake. Its current face tilts down into the water along one edge, and a new face rises above the surface, ascending hundreds of feet into the air before plunging down in an enormous spray of water. Roll a d6 to determine which face comes up, ignoring the current face.

Avoiding being dunked into the Styx sea is most easily accomplished by quickly moving to and opening a door into the cube, by flying (though characters doing so will be attacked by the vampiric mists), or by running toward the rising face as the cube turns. Characters who run along the tilting cube discover that each face of the cube has its own gravity. Even when a face is tilted nearly 90 degrees in the moments before it plunges into the water, creatures can move along its surface as if it were level ground. However, the violent motion of the twisting cube can easily toss creatures into the water.

Each creature running across the tilting cube must make three DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks. A creature that succeeds on at least two checks reaches the next face safely, while all creatures that fail two checks are plunged into the water. A creature that ignores difficult terrain or whose speed is greater than 30 feet has advantage on all three checks.

When a new face of the cube is exposed, the formerly submerged side remains temporarily affected by the curse-removing effects of the Styx sea, letting the characters see the surface of the cube in its true form: a vast expanse of waterlogged bodies. The dead repixelate over the next four hours, giving the characters time to easily inspect them if they choose to.

If the characters watch the island for long enough from their vessel, they might also see the cube roll. Ask one player for a d20 roll whenever the characters finish a long or short rest within view of the island, with the cube rolling on a 10 or less. Though the cube's movement sends waves crashing against nearby ships, characters on those ships are in no danger.

EXPLORING THE CUBE UNDERWATER

Even creatures that can breathe underwater have a difficult time exploring the island's submerged areas, because of the mind-wiping effect of the Styx sea. A submerged creature continually feels the dark power of the water, and must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw every minute or suffer its mind-wiping effects.

Underneath the water, the 'landscape' of the cube appears in its true form of iron piled high with the bodies of the dead. A spell such as *Otiluke's resilient sphere* or a magic item such as the *apparatus of Kwalish* can allow the characters to explore the water more easily. However, visibility in the murky Styx sea is limited to 10 feet in any direction.

Even for characters who succeed on their saves or can explore under the water safely, the invisible hydroloths that guard the island are a deadly threat. Those fiends follow, attack, and kill any creatures in the water unless their attention is distracted by something happening elsewhere.

Any creature that swims within 40 feet of one of the cube's underwater faces feels a momentary dizzy sensation as it's pulled 'down' by the submerged face's local gravity. A creature can easily swim away from the cube's surface (the effect is no stronger than normal gravity), though doing so is mildly disorienting.

The cube's doors won't open on any face that is submerged, and most inhabitants of the cube retreat

inside when the face they normally dwell on is underwater. The only exceptions are the corpse flower of face 4, the bronze scouts and other constructs of face 2, and the cadaver collector that roams all the faces of the cube (see “Random Encounters”). These creatures are unaffected by the Styx sea, and can be encountered by characters exploring under the water.

CUBE 1717

Built as a floating iron fortress in the planar war-world of Acheron, the cube is filled with machinery whose complexity rivals the biology of any living creature. Like a parasite, the Archquadrone plugged itself into the center of that machinery, and the entire cube is now infected by the pixelating curse still pumping from the construct’s heart. The cube cannot operate at full capacity until its ‘brain’ has been fully engaged by the Six-Face Throne. But its autonomic functions still control the internal gravity, the opening and shutting of doors, and the cleanup system that has been disgorging bodies onto the outside of the cube.

If damaged, the cube can heal itself as long as its ‘heart’ beats, slowly generating new, pixelated metal to replace that which was destroyed.

EXTERIOR DOORS

At various points on each face of the cube (except for face 1), a number of metal doors lead into the interior. When the cube is submerged or has freshly risen from the water, these doors appear as 20-foot-wide, 6-inch thick circular metal hatches. At four cardinal points just outside the edge of the door, smaller 1-foot-wide circles are covered with symbolic patterns of law and set with the indentation of a handprint.

The circles radiate abjuration to a *detect magic* spell. If a lawful creature presses its hand into any indentation, the door irises open with a whoosh, revealing a 20-foot-wide shaft with four ladders (one beneath each handprint) leading down. Nonlawful creatures can use the hand of a dead lawful creature (including any of the creatures on the surface) to open the door.

When the characters first come to the island—and within 10 minutes of a cube face emerging from the water—the doors are pixelated. Though the circles are still recognizable, the symbols of law and the handprint appear as boxy, illegible mosaics. While a door is in this form, it opens only when the flesh of a lawful creature is pressed into the door in a cubical shape. Any creatures or bodies on the surface have their hands automatically conform to a cubical shape when they are pixelated. Alternatively, the characters can press, flense, or *polymorph* the flesh of a lawful creature so that it fits the shape.

A *remove curse* or *dispel magic* spell cast upon a pixelated circle causes it to become unpixelated for 10 minutes, allowing it to be used with a normal handprint.

Near the top of each of the four ladders, a pixelated handprint lock operates the door from the other side. The interior of each shaft is lit by glowing pixels in the walls at regular intervals. Like the doors, the shafts are

circular, but show pixelated edges made of numerous tiny cubes. The rungs of the ladders are also square.

When any character passes through the doors—or 10 seconds after opening a door if no character does—square pixel lights in the shaft walls near the doors flash red, a hidden alarm blares, and the doors seal shut. If a lawful creature’s body blocks the door, the door stays open and the red lights continue flashing until the creature moves. The doors close around the body of any other creature, which must succeed on a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw to leap out of the way or take 35 (10d6) slashing damage as the door irises closed on them. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by this damage dies as the door cuts it in two. A creature not killed by the door chooses which side of the door it ends up on.

The doors have AC 20; 100 hit points; a damage threshold of 7; immunity to psychic and poison damage; immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. The first 20 damage dealt to a door opens a small hole in it, just wide enough to let a character look through. Anyone dealing bludgeoning, piercing, slashing, or thunder damage to the doors makes noise that echoes deep into the cube, alerting any nearby guards. As long as the Six-Face Throne is active, damaged or destroyed doors slowly regenerate, returning to their original condition in 1 hour.

JUNCTION ROOMS

By default, each face of the cube has its own local gravity, which is controlled from area 6.28 and extends 40 feet above and below each face. When characters descend deeper into the cube, the gravity from face 6 (the dominant face) takes over. This change in gravity is potentially disorienting—and can be deadly in certain areas.

Several doors on the cube’s surface lead to junction rooms that allow travel from one face to another. Some junctions lead to two faces, while others lead to three. A character who flies, climbs, or falls down the 40-foot shaft to the ‘bottom’ of the junction room lands in what seems to be the bottom of a 20-foot-wide well-like space, which features two or three identical 20-foot-wide shafts leading up. Each shaft has ladders on its four sides, like most of the corridors inside the cube.

The special gravity of the cube combines with illusion magic to make the ‘floor’ of each junction room appear to be down. All the shafts leading out seem to lead up, even though the different shafts lead to different cube faces that are perpendicular to one another. This odd effect causes all nonpixelated creatures to have disadvantage on attack rolls while in a junction room.

MOVING THE CUBE

Characters who climb down one shaft into the junction room, then climb up another shaft leading onto a different face find themselves under one of the exterior doors, with four pixelated handprint circles controlling the door from the inside. However, if any of these circles are activated, the opening of the door is delayed by

nearly half a minute while red lights beep and a faint shaking is felt—a sign that the cube is rotating.

Any attempt to open a door currently underwater causes the cube to move in this way, putting the face the characters are trying to exit onto above the surface, and preventing water from pouring in when the door is opened. Many of the seemingly random rotations of the cube are caused by creatures traveling between faces in this way.

If one group of characters goes inside a junction room and travels to a new face while other characters are on the surface, those characters outside need to deal with the cube's movement (see "When the Cube Rolls"). If different groups of characters or NPCs try to operate different underwater doors at the same time, an alarm blares and the cube doesn't move. Likewise, if a face about to go underwater has a door opened on it, the cube temporarily ceases its movement and alarms go off. The skull lord Vargo and other creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne can override such conflicts to open and close any door they choose and orient the cube accordingly—even to the extent of forcing doors to close on lawful creatures.

Characters who step out through a door that has just emerged above the water see that face of the island covered with wet, unpixelated bodies just emerged from the sea (unless they're on face 5 and the balhannoth is alive). If the face of the cube they left most recently was also unpixelated, characters might assume that they've returned to that face, with no visible landmarks except hills of bodies, the drow ship in the distance, and the sea stretching to the horizon.

INTERIOR DOORS AND GRAVITY SWITCHES

Several exterior doors lead deeper into the interior of the cube, as noted in their descriptions. These entrances are notable for having a second door, identical to the exterior door, 40 feet along the shaft. The double doors are an extra level of defense to protect the cube's vital interior. They can be opened like the exterior doors, and regenerate in the same way if damaged or destroyed.

Beyond each interior door, the 20-foot-wide shaft continues on into the depths of Cube 1717. However, beyond the 40-foot point marking the interior door, the local gravity of the nearest face is canceled out by the gravity of face 6. Characters moving down these shafts feel the strange sensation of gravity swiftly changing, so that a character climbing down a ladder on a wall will suddenly be crawling backward along a floor. Once they adjust to the new gravity, characters can stand and walk in the shaft as they explore the interior of the cube.

Characters in the interior under face 6 who move toward many of the doors on other faces have the reverse experience. Over the space of a few steps, it suddenly becomes harder and harder to walk forward, until the characters must crouch down and climb along the ladder as the floor becomes a wall.

These shifts in gravity are disorienting but harmless. However, two places in the cube transform this gravity switch into a potentially deadly trap. All the inhabitants

of the cube know about these areas and how to safely move through them. See area 4.3 and area 5.2 for more information.

FEATURES OF THE CUBE

All the interior spaces of the cube are pixelated except for areas 6.17 and 6.18 (Avnas's rooms), area 6.22 (the surgery), area 6.23 (the laboratory), area 6.29 (the library), area 6.31 (Vargo's chamber), and area 6.38 (the temple of Tiamat). The characters might be able to see unpixelated versions of other rooms, either by using *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix), or by using *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or Styx water to temporarily unpixelate part of the room.

Before it was pixelated, the interior of the cube had an austere, fortress-like look, punctuated by ornate devilish imagery. Pixelation has simplified that look to an even harsher, more barren appearance. Unless otherwise specified, all interior corridors and rooms are dimly lit by white or red pixel panels, set into the walls at 30-foot intervals. The main corridors and shafts running between rooms are 20 feet wide, while some smaller corridors are 10 feet wide. Most corridors are perfectly square or rectangular, while the shafts are circular with pixelated edges. The risk of gravitational shifts means that corridors and rooms feature emergency ladders or rungs set into grooves running along floors, ceilings, and walls.

Noisy Passage. Unless the characters take care to use stealth, any movement through the cube sets footsteps echoing loudly off its iron floors and walls, alerting creatures in adjacent rooms. Likewise, the characters receive advance warning of any nonstealthy creatures approaching.

Damage and Destruction. Many parts of the cube's interior (particularly areas 6.14, 6.32, and 6.39) retain damage from the battle with the yugoloths that sent the cube to the Material Plane. Some rooms have been completely destroyed and are inaccessible, but characters who return to these damaged places over the course of a few hours notice that the metal in those areas is slowly regenerating. If the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) remains active, the cube completely heals itself in time, and the damaged rooms reappear.

FACE 1: EXHAUST PORT

This face is the bottom of the ship in its normal orientation, with face 6 on the top. It is the only face that has no doors leading to junction rooms and other faces. Instead, the only way in or out of the face is its central shaft.

When the characters first survey face 1, they see gray steam rising from a crater in the distance, mixing with the fog as strange chemical compounds evaporate from the pool at area 1.1.

AREA 1.1: CENTRAL SHAFT

Within a rough-walled crater rising at the center of face 1, a 40-foot-wide circular shaft drops 30 feet into a pool of murky, steaming water. An oily substance clings to the pool's surface in glinting squares, like fish scales.

The sides of the shaft resemble blackened iron and are slick, such that climbing up or down without using a rope requires a successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) check. A character who tests or enters the murky black water finds it the temperature of a warm bath, and notes that it smells like cassia (or cinnamon), oil, and tar. The oily substance is pixelated, and crystallizes in pixel-like masses on the skin and clothes of characters in the water. These encrustations are harmless and can be brushed off. (The water was originally from the Styx sea, but the exceptionally powerful pixelating curse within the shaft has dispelled its powers and turned it into normal water.)

Exhaust Port Pool. A character who tries to swim to the bottom of the black pool feels a strange dizzying sensation when they are 10 feet under the surface. If they continue to dive, they pass through a layer of floating debris—most of it pixelated body parts—then find themselves suddenly swimming upward. Characters emerge from the other side of the pool at the bottom of area 6.47—a slimy, air-filled, 200-foot-long shaft dimly lit by red lights high above.

Passing through the pool this way involves a gravity flip into the dominant gravity of face 6, so that the character's former 'up' is now 'down.' The full depth of the pool is 20 feet—10 feet on either side of the debris wall that marks where the gravity switches. A magical pressure barrier beneath face 6 keeps water from entering the cube this way when face 1 is submerged.

This shaft is the exhaust port for Cube 1717. Every hour on the hour, the cube expels garbage and bodies through the shaft, dropping it from area 6.47 and then forcing it out of area 1.1 in an explosive geyser of cubic debris. During the characters' first time on face 1, roll a d6 every 10 minutes. On a 1, the cube shoots up a geyser, spraying the area around area 1.1 with piles of pixelated dead. The same geyser then erupts every hour thereafter.

AREA 1.2: JUVENILE CORPSE FLOWERS

A mat of strange, fleshy green plants with purple buds, each about six inches high, grows here upon the mosaic-like 'rock' of the island. The plants completely cover the surface down to the cube's edge, where they disappear

under the water. The plants are unpixelated, and have a smell like rotten flesh.

The mat of vegetation is a mass of immature corpse flowers (from *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*), growing from the main mass at area 4.5. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Nature or Arcana) check identifies these plant creatures. Immune to the Styx sea, the corpse flowers are growing rapidly, though this patch is harmless. A character who uproots a portion of the patch sees it is growing from the bodies underneath. The Styx water traveling through the plants' roots unpixelates the bodies on the surface, which blend seamlessly into the cubical, pixelated bodies outside the roots' range.

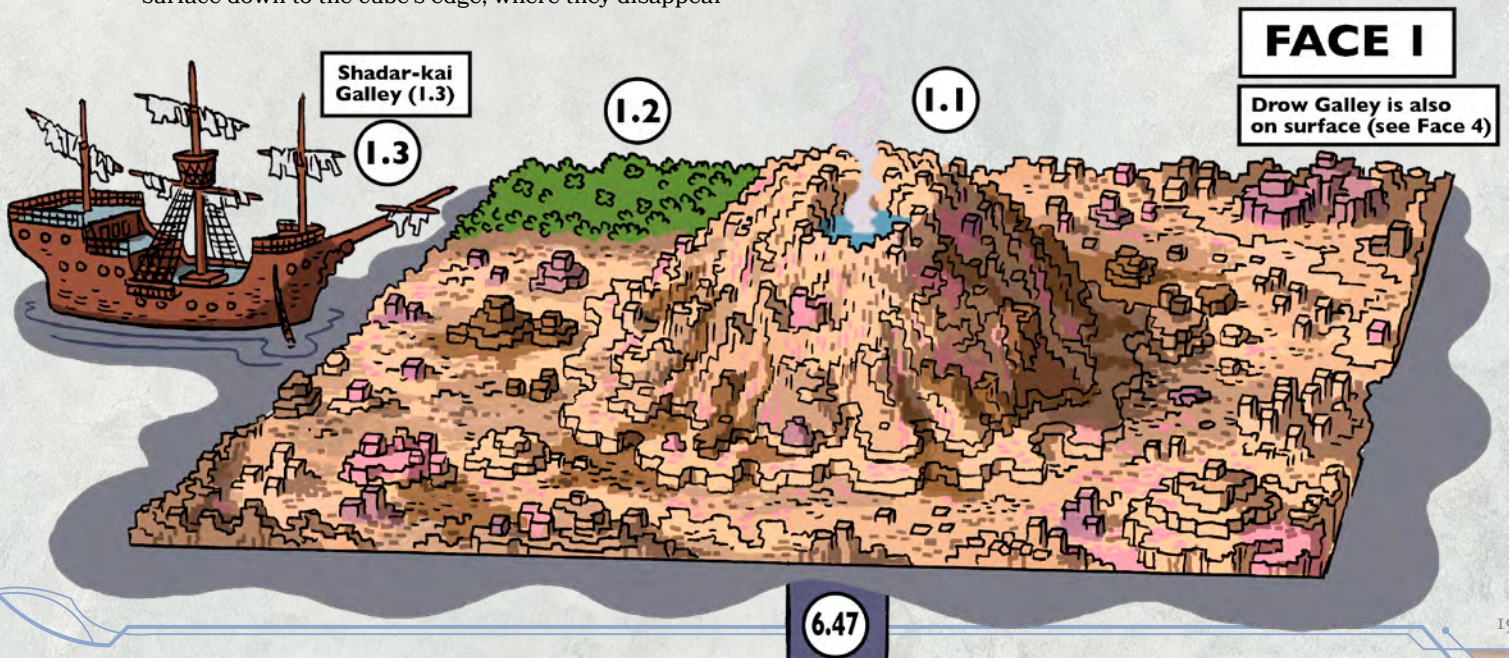
AREA 1.3: SHADAR-KAI CARAVEL

When face 1 is up, a strange ship floats on the waves 50 feet from the edge of the island. This caravel is gray and white, and decorated with white carvings of autumn leaves. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (History) check identifies the style as suggestive of the mysterious shadar-kai. The ship is badly battered, its sails are missing, and it floats low on the waterline. Its anchor is dropped (and stuck in face 2).

The interior of the caravel is thoroughly wet but still relatively intact. Anything of value on board has been ruined, though, and the ship's cargo hold is partly flooded with the water of the Styx sea. Whenever a face of the cube other than 1 or 2 rises to the surface, the shadar-kai caravel is dragged down beneath the water. Though the ship sinks a little more each time, it still maintains partial buoyancy from the air trapped within its cabins.

Sole Survivor. Any characters searching the ship for valuables or survivors find relatively recent footprints along the wet floor. These lead to a locked storage closet in the stern. The locked door can be picked with a successful DC 16 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or smashed open with a successful DC 13 Strength check.

Hiding in the storage closet is Fern, a frightened and wary survivor of the shadar-kai expedition. Fern is a **shadar-kai shadow dancer** with the following changes:





SHADAR-KAI
SHADOW
DANCER

- Her Intelligence is 14.
- She wears a *cap of water breathing*.
- She wields a +1 *spiked chain*.

Fern is able to leave the galley and search the island when face 2 is up and the caravel is beached (see that section for more information). However, she has not figured out how to open the cube's doors. When the characters meet her, she is suffering only 1 physical level of the pixelating curse, since she is cured of it (and loses her memories of having been pixelated before) whenever the cube rolls and the caravel is resubmerged.

The closet contains all the valuable items Fern could scavenge from the ship: two *potions of healing* and a week's worth of soggy food and fresh water.

Fractured Memories. Fern and her crewmates—led by a shadar-kai elder—received a message from the Raven Queen that the walls of life and death had been breached, and that the dead had escaped. They journeyed to the island in an attempt to discover the nature of the breach and try to close it. But their mission turned to disaster when all except Fern were killed by the hydroloths and the vampiric mists. Fern escaped by fleeing back to the ship and hiding. But a few hours later, the cube flipped

to send the caravel under the water with its anchor firmly stuck to the submerged side. Fern's *cap of water breathing* allowed her to survive the immersion, but did nothing to deter the Styx sea's memory-wiping effects.

Exposure to Styx water has created huge gaps in Fern's memory, including everything that has happened since she first sighted the island. She doesn't remember where she came from or what else the Raven Queen told the shadar-kai. She warns the characters that there are dangerous creatures in the water that ate her friends.

Additionally, if the characters befriend her, Fern shares one more memory so powerful that even the Styx sea can't erase it: she volunteered for the shadar-kai mission because she dreamed that her dead friend Astilbe was on the island and could be rescued. (Astilbe was one of the reborn souls doomed to fight on Acheron, but was converted into a pixelated creature and is now one of the skull lord's guards at area 6.31.) Fern will join the characters if they promise to help her search for Astilbe.

FACE 2: ANCHOR POINT

The most notable feature of this face is the shadar-kai caravel (area 2.3) resting on its side, attached by its anchor chain and guarded by an unexpected defender. A number of metallic cubic 'rocks' are also scattered across the face, growing thickest in area 2.5.

AREA 2.1: JUNCTION ROOM

A door at this location leads to a two-way junction room, then beyond to area 4.1.

AREA 2.2: JUNCTION ROOM

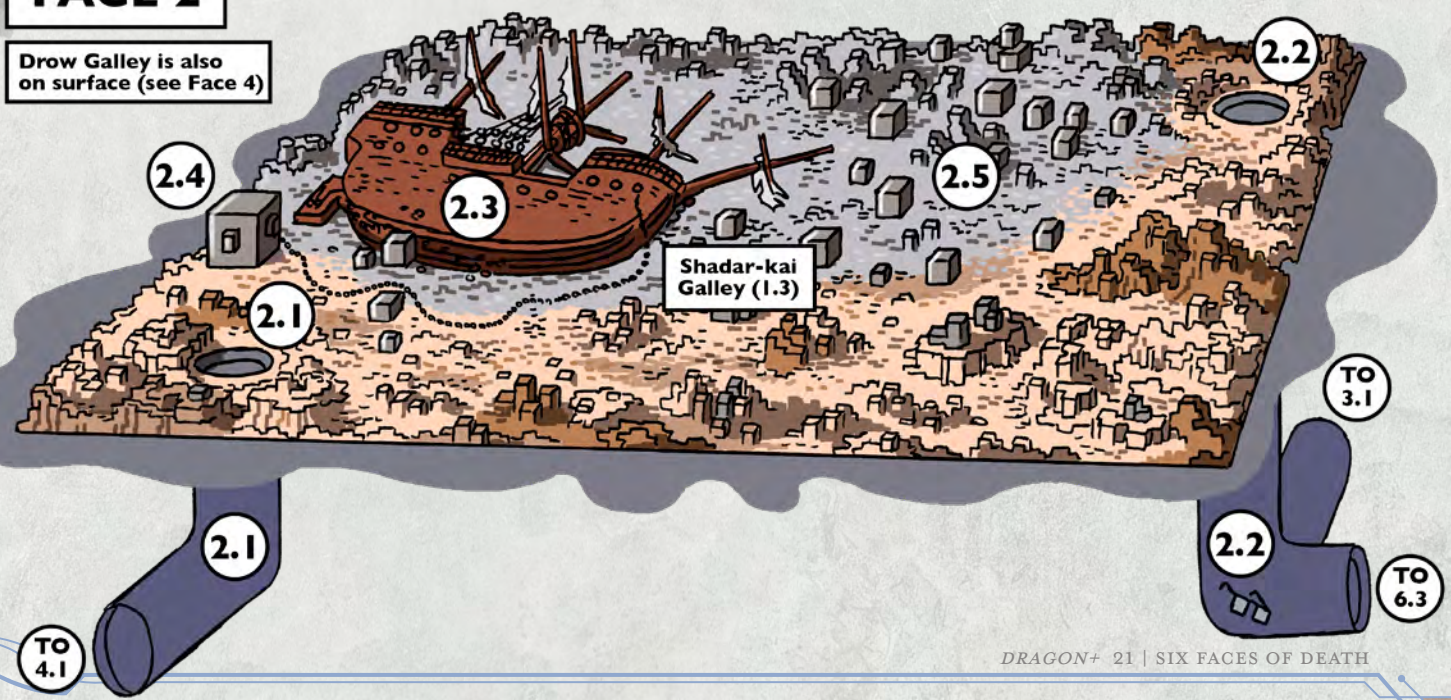
This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 3.1 and area 6.3. A set of *pixel glasses* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

AREA 2.3: SHADAR-KAI CARAVEL

The foundering shadar-kai ship is described at area 1.3, but characters who see it on this face will come to

FACE 2

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



understand how the shadar-kai accidentally anchored the ship too well. When the cube rolls and face 2 comes up, the shadar-kai caravel is pulled out of the water to end up lying on its side, as if thrown there by a giant. Its stout iron anchor chain, 100 feet long, leads away from the ship to area 2.4.

Like everything else on the island, the caravel is vulnerable to the pixelating curse. If face 2 is above the water when the characters first come to the island, the wood of the ship has already started to transform into brown cubes. Within four hours, the caravel is entirely pixelated, though it is still recognizable as a ship.

AREA 2.4: ANCHOR

When the shadar-kai caravel dropped its anchor, it was caught by the gravitational pull of face 2 and thoroughly embedded in the face's iron surface. That spot is now guarded by a confused gnomish construct called a **stone defender** (see *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*). Normally called upon as a bodyguard, the stone defender has decided that it guards the anchor, and it attacks anyone who approaches this area.

If face 2 has been out of the water for more than a few hours, the stone defender takes on the form of a human-sized gray cubical rock next to where the pixelated anchor is embedded. If anyone approaches, the construct attacks with surprise, with its False Appearance making its pixelated body blend into the pixelated landscape. If face 2 has just emerged from the water, the stone defender is in its true form of a stout, humanoid robot with stone plates bolted into its metal frame.

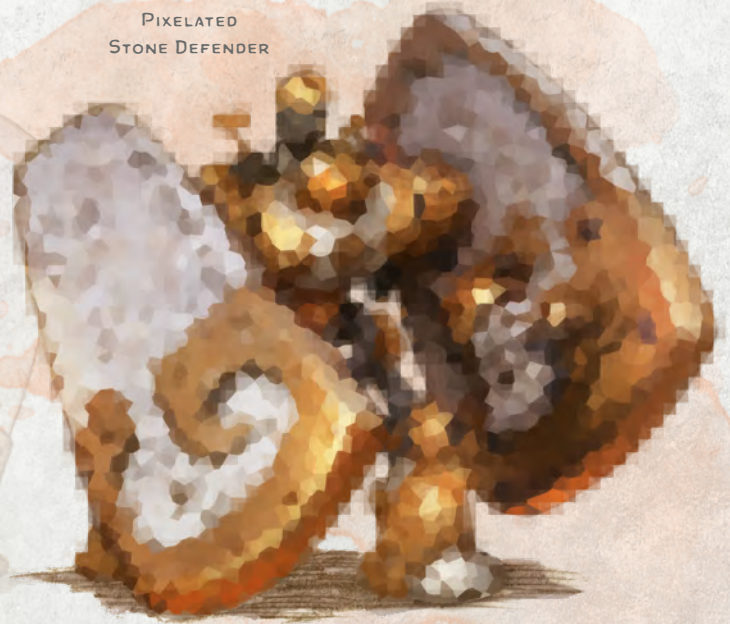
The stone defender normally defends the anchor until destroyed, but it can be tricked into guarding another item instead if the characters present one. Destroying the defender, getting it to guard another item, or cutting the anchor chain frees the shadar-kai caravel, which floats up freely (though it remains damaged and in need of serious repairs) the next time the cube rolls.

AREA 2.5: CLOCKWORK CONGREGATION

This section of the face is covered with metallic objects, all of them the remnants of clockworks created by Avnas. When the cube is pixelated, this area takes the form of an unusually large number of shining gray-and-brown metallic blocks, which continue over the edge to face 3. Some of the blocks make a ticking sound, or crawl and hop around.

When the cube isn't pixelated, the broken constructs can be seen in their real forms as strange bronze and iron devices, scattered among the dead bodies. Though

PIXELATED
STONE DEFENDER



most of them are destroyed, a few still twitch, flip, or crawl in circles like malfunctioning toys.

Amid the harmless mass of barely functional clockwork devices, a number of constructs are potential threats. Each time the characters approach this area, or each 10 minutes they spend here, roll a d6 to determine what they encounter. All these creatures can be found in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. You might wish to use the Clockwork Malfunctions table in that book to give personality to these damaged constructs.

d6 Construct Encounter

1-2	2d4 bronze scouts
3	1 oaken bolter
4	1d2 iron cobras
5	1 stone defender
6	1d4 duergar screamers

Bronze Scouts. When encountered, these bronze scouts are in the process of pushing the dead around the face of the cube. They crawl toward any creatures they can see or hear to assess them, but lose interest in living creatures and depart the following round if they are ignored. If attacked, the bronze scouts fight until destroyed.

Oaken Bolter. This war machine immediately begins firing at any creature that moves within its field of view. Its vision and memory are poor, though, so if any creatures hide or stand perfectly still for 2 rounds, it ignores them and rolls away.

Iron Cobras. Any iron cobras the characters stumble upon are hiding, aided by their impressive Dexterity (Stealth) checks and the advantage they gain on those checks if the face is pixelated. If an iron cobra takes any damage, it flees and hides.

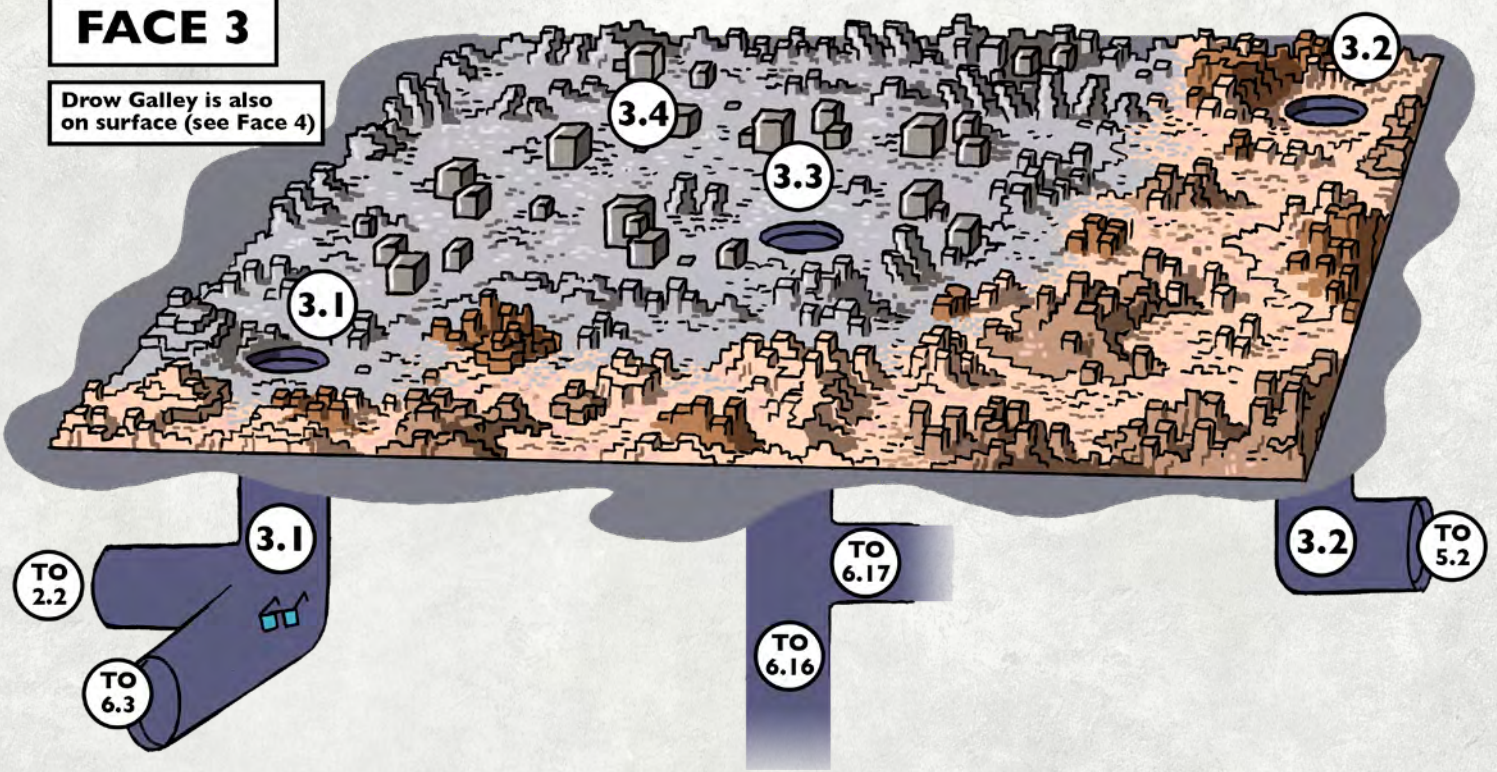
Stone Defender. The stone defender has picked a spot or a random object to guard, gesturing threateningly at any creature that comes close, and attacking if any creature comes within 5 feet. If left alone, the construct forgets about the spot or object it defends, then wanders off and repeats the process.

PIXELATED BRONZE SCOUT



FACE 3

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



Duergar Screamer. With their shrill, terrifying voices, these constructs are heard before they are seen. They hunt and fight all non-duergar humanoid until destroyed.

FACE 3: JUNKYARD

Face 3 appears as a wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on its pixelated state. It has few notable features except the large number of metallic blocks and cubes that spread across its surface.

AREA 3.1: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 2.2 and area 6.3. A pair of *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

AREA 3.2: JUNCTION ROOM

A door at this location leads to a two-way junction room, then beyond to area 5.2.

AREA 3.3: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between areas 6.16 and 6.17.

AREA 3.4: CLOCKWORK CONGREGATION

This area of metallic cubes is identical to area 2.5, and has the same random construct encounters.

FACE 4: GARDEN OF THE DEAD

Face 4 is a wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on its pixelated state. Its dominant feature is the enormous green mass of juvenile corpse flowers that spreads across area 4.5.

AREA 4.1: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a two-way junction room and area 2.1 beyond. Anyone who emerges from or approaches this door draws the attention of the corpse flower at area 4.5.

AREA 4.2: SPECIAL JUNCTION ROOM

An interior door opens up 40 feet beyond the exterior door. Halfway between the exterior and interior doors, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6. Beyond the interior door is area 6.33A.

AREA 4.3: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between area 6.1 and area 6.8.

Any creature moving toward this area through level 6 simply climbs along a ladder, passing the ‘horizontal’ ladder shaft to area 4.3 as they do. However, creatures descending from area 4.3 must carefully navigate a change in the cube’s internal gravity.

Deadly Gravity. From the perspective of those coming from area 4.3, the shaft abruptly opens up in what appears to be the ceiling of a two-way corridor. Two of the four ladders leading down curve and run along the ceiling of this corridor, while the other two go halfway down the wall of the corridor before turning 90 degrees to the left and right. Looking down into the corridor, the characters see that the T corridor ends in another circular metal door (area 6.1) in one direction. In the other direction, the corridor continues 60 feet before widening out into a strange room filled with blocky furniture (area 6.8). With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character notices that the furniture in area 6.8 appears to be on the wall, while the floor is bare except for a few glowing lights.

A character who climbs down the ladder from area 4.3 to the corridor feels their legs suddenly falling out from under them, as their lower body is pulled toward area 6.8 while their upper body remains in the gravitation of face 4. The character must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw to hold onto the ladder rungs. On a failed save, the character falls and instantly whooshes down the corridor—whose gravity suddenly makes it an open shaft. The character takes 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage from the 60-foot fall into area 6.8, lands prone, and is quickly surrounded by pixelated **merregon**[™] and pixelated **veteran** guards. See area 6.8 for more details.

If a character expects it, the gravity shift is easy to overcome by carefully climbing down one of the curved ladders onto the apparent ceiling of the corridor. This leaves the character clinging to the ladder going down, as the ceiling turns out to be one of the walls of the shaft.

AREA 4.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction whose shafts lead on to area 5.4 and area 6.4.

AREA 4.5: CORPSE FLOWER GARDEN

A **corpse flower** (detailed in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*) grows here with nine bodies stuck in its tendrils. Spreading out around the flourishing flower is a carpet of juvenile plants: a thick mat of fleshy green leaves and tiny purple blossoms that reek of rotten flesh. This mat of greenery spills over the edge of the cube to area 1.2 on face 1.

The corpse flower attacks any living creatures that get close to it or attack it, and it moves slowly toward such creatures when it sees them. It routinely dispenses with its nine corpses to heal itself or send zombies against the characters, knowing that it has a near-unlimited supply of the dead beneath its roots. The corpse flower and the dead beneath it are always unpixelated, as the



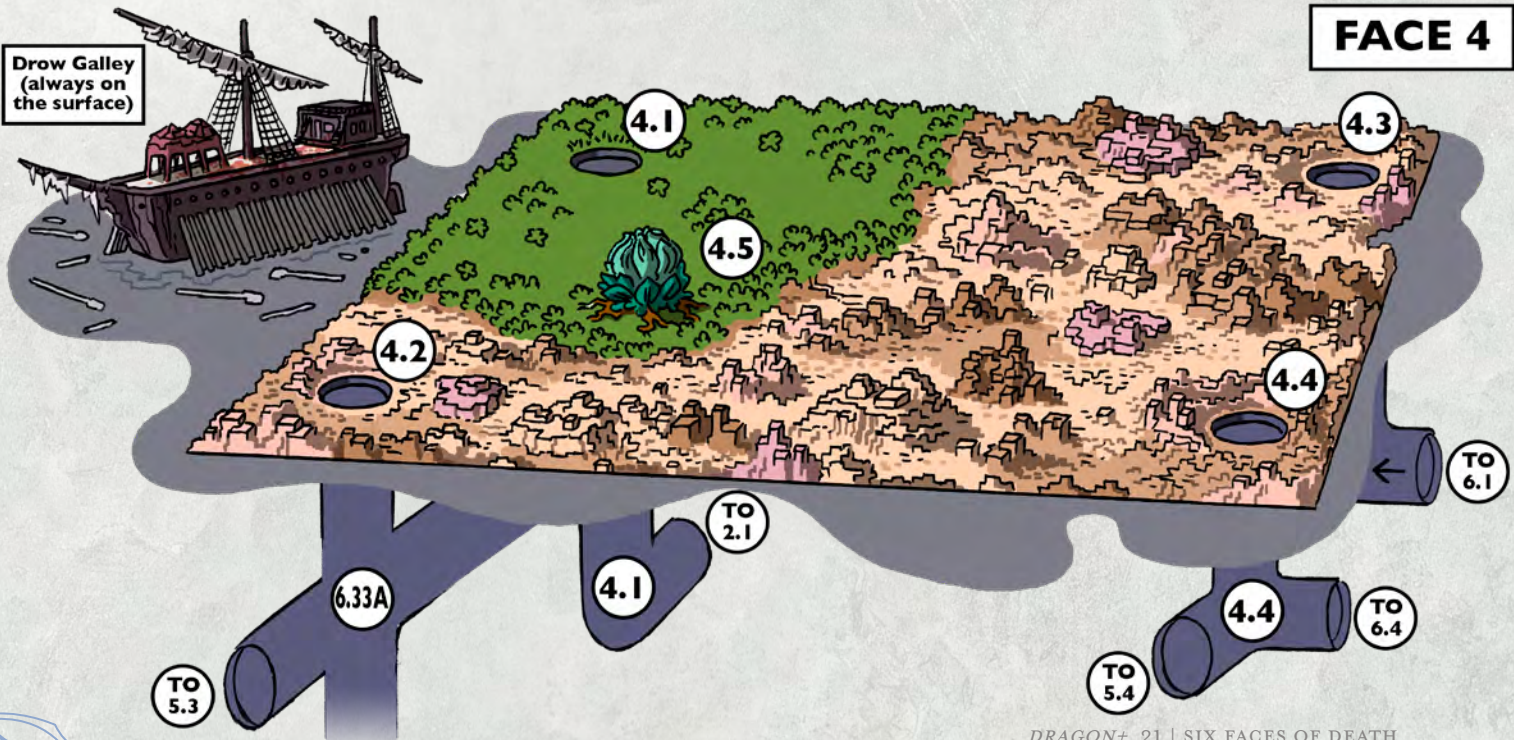
CORPSE FLOWER

Styx water the plant draws up through its roots washes through the bodies.

If the adventurers kill the corpse flower, they can dig beneath its roots, finding 1,200 gp, 400 sp, and a gold and jade death mask worth 900 gp.

FACE 5: BEAUTIFUL ISLAND

This face appears as a verdant tropical island. Sandy beaches open up to island grass and shrubs, beyond which spreads a jungle of banana plants, coconut palms,





and other trees. Gentle breezes blow here, and the gray fog that covers the island seems less oppressive than it does on other faces.

This vista seems entirely real. The sand and plants can be picked up, touched, and smelled, and even appear immune to the pixelating curse. But with closer investigation, characters might begin to spot cracks in this facade. No birds or animals can be heard or seen on the island. The breadfruit, bananas, and other seemingly edible plants are tasteless and provide no nutrition. The wood of the trees quickly begins to rot if cut, and the grass and shrubs will not burn.

Another giveaway as to the true nature of face 5 can be noted by characters who have visited the drow galley: the smell of the balhannoth. Any character who inspects the cargo hold of the drow ship and then comes to face 5 recognizes the same foul smell with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check, and notes that smell growing stronger toward area 5.5. For the characters who don't recognize it, the smell is faintly bothersome but easy to ignore.

WARPED REALITY

The appearance of face 5 has been warped and reshaped by the balhannoth lairing under area 5.5. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more

information about the balhannoth). The balhannoth can sense the presence of any creatures on face 5, and has been using its telepathy to sense the desires of all creatures within one mile of the island since it escaped its confinement on the drow ship. The appearance of the pleasant island has been created in response to the thoughts of the many sailors that have come to investigate the cube.

The balhannoth's hunting partner is the adult oblex that dwells at area 5.1, and which can take the form of living creatures that the balhannoth can't create. Unified by the conforming power of the pixelating curse, the two normally solitary creatures have formed a symbiotic relationship where they communicate telepathically and hunt prey together. When face 5 is submerged, they retreat beneath the doors until it surfaces again.

If the balhannoth dies, face 5 is slowly transformed back into its true form over 10 minutes—another wasteland of rock or bodies, depending on the state of its pixelation.

AREA 5.1: OBLEX DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a shaft leads on to area 6.42. This shaft is filled with white and pink deposits of pixelated slime—the remains of the oblex's meals.

An **adult oblex**—a psychic ooze that can generate simulacra in the form of other creatures—uses this door to come and go. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for full details on the oblex.) The oblex can generate 1d4 + 1 simulacra resembling living creatures whose memories it has stolen. The number of creatures it managed to kill during the chaotic attacks that brought the cube to the Material Plane has given it a host of fiendish and humanoid forms it can take on.

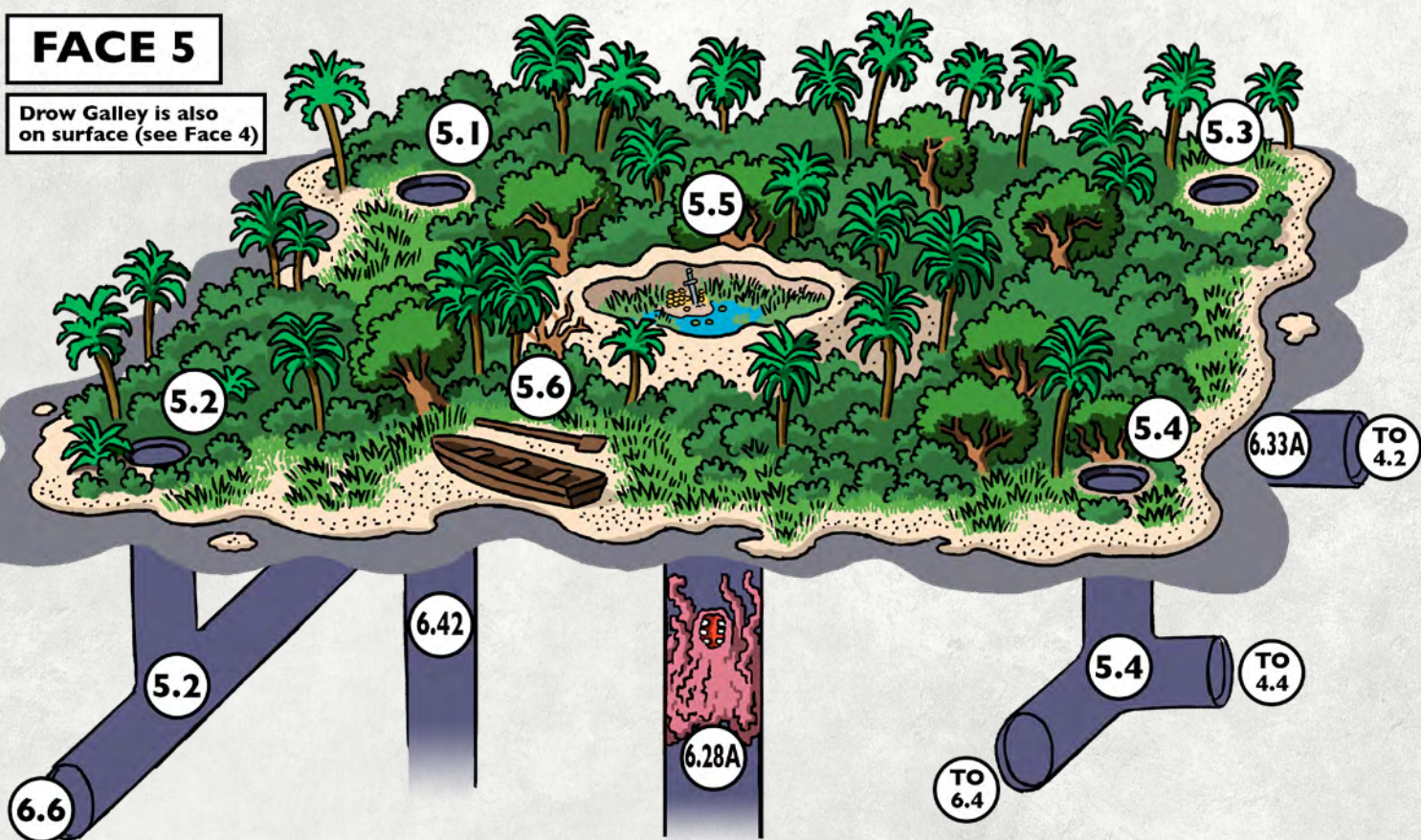
Creating simulacra of people needing aid or weak fiends just asking to be destroyed, the oblex sends those simulacra out of the jungle near area 5.1, while it stays concealed within the trees. (The oblex's true form is pixelated, resembling a large mass of pink and red jelly-like cubes. But it can create nonpixelated bodies to lure prey.) If only one or two characters are present, the oblex attacks through one of its simulacra at once. If more are present, it tries to get the group to split up, sending some to the pool at area 5.5 and encouraging others to descend through the door and head for areas 6.42 and 6.43, where its oblex spawn lie in wait.

A character who interacts with a simulacrum notices that it carries a faint scent of sulfur. A character might also notice the pixelated pink tether connecting the simulacrum to the oblex with a successful Wisdom (Perception) check opposed by the Oblex's Charisma (Deception) check.

Because the oblex is lawful, the door won't close on its tether if it and any of its simulacra are on opposite sides of it. If the door is held open in this way for more than a few minutes, the oblex either retreats down the shaft or slithers up onto the surface.

FACE 5

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



AREA 5.2: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6, and a short corridor leads to the junction space between area 6.6 and area 6.42.

Any creature moving toward this area through level 6 simply climbs along a ladder, passing the 'horizontal' ladder shaft to area 5.2 as they do. However, creatures descending from area 5.2 must carefully navigate a change in the cube's internal gravity.

Deadly Gravity. From the perspective of those coming from area 5.2, the shaft abruptly opens up in what appears to be the ceiling of a two-way corridor. Two of the four ladders leading down curve and run along the ceiling of this corridor, while the other two go halfway down the wall of the corridor before turning 90 degrees to the left and right. Looking down into the corridor, the characters see that the T corridor ends in another circular metal door (area 6.6) in one direction. In the other direction, the corridor continues a long distance into darkness.

Where the shaft from area 5.2 meets the shaft below, a shapeless red cubic mosaic stands out on the otherwise featureless black iron wall. If touched, some of it rubs off. If any character has *true seeing* or views the mosaic with *pixel glasses*, they see the pixelated mosaic in its true form as a message written in blood by a previous visitor. The message reads in Common: 'THE FLOOR BECOMES THE WALL! LOOK OUT!'

A character who climbs down the ladder from area 5.2 to the corridor feels their legs suddenly falling out from

under them, as their lower body is pulled toward area 6.42 while their upper body remains in the gravitation of face 5. The character must make a successful DC 13 Strength saving throw to hold onto the ladder rungs. On a failed save, the character falls and instantly whooshes down the corridor—whose gravity suddenly makes it an open shaft. The character falls nearly 600 feet to area 6.42, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

If a character expects it, the gravity shift is easy to overcome by carefully climbing down one of the curved ladders onto the apparent ceiling of the corridor. This leaves the character clinging to the ladder going down, as the ceiling turns out to be one of the walls of the shaft.

AREA 5.3: SPECIAL JUNCTION ROOM

An interior door opens up 40 feet beyond the exterior door. Halfway between the exterior and interior doors, gravity suddenly shifts to the orientation of face 6. Beyond the interior door is area 6.33A.

AREA 5.4: JUNCTION ROOM

This three-way junction room leads to the doors at area 4.4 and area 6.4.

AREA 5.5: POOL

At the center of the false jungle, the ground plunges down beneath tall trees to form a crater containing a shallow pool of clear water 30 feet below its upper edge. It takes a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to climb down the crater without a rope. The pool is 3 feet deep, with lily pads on its surface and horsetails and grasses growing along the shore. A tempting pile of treasure is spread along the edge of the pool—873 gp,

10 opals (100 gp each), a gold bracelet (250 gp), a suit of drow-made *+2 leather armor*, and a brass incense burner covered with fiendish symbols—a *censer of blood*. (See the “New Magic Item” appendix for more information on the *censer of blood*. Originally carried by the oinoloth now a prisoner in area 6.11A, the censer was lost here in the frenzied fight when the yugoloths were attacked by the balhannoth. That creature has no idea of the censer’s power.)

When not transformed by the balhannoth, the inside of the crater is a metal shaft with a spiral ramp carved along its sides, and which ends in a 20-foot-wide door identical to any of the other doors on or within the cube. But between this door and the interior door below waits the hungry **balhannoth** that has created face 5’s false island paradise.

Unseen Threats. The balhannoth is fully pixelated, appearing as a monstrous blob of cubes with four long, semicubic tentacles and a blind mouth of gnashing rectangular teeth. Its pixelated nature has bound its unnatural power to the cube, so that its blindsight and its lair actions extend beyond their normal range and across the full breadth of face 5. This makes the balhannoth aware of the movements of any creatures on the beautiful island. Though it is capable of hunting on the surface, it prefers to lure creatures down to the pool, whereupon it teleports to the top of the crater to leave prey trapped between it and the door.

The balhannoth can also simply teleport creatures under the door of this area, using its lair action. A deadly ambush predator, it lives to hunt and uses this method only rarely. But if the characters bring any NPCs onto face 5 with them, the balhannoth can pick them off this way, creating the impression of comrades simply vanishing into the jungle with no warning.

Being fully pixelated has made the balhannoth a servant of the skull lord. If the characters enter the cube without killing the balhannoth, the skull lord can telepathically summon the creature into the cube to help trap the characters in a specialized prison. See area 6.25 for more information.

Cannon Shaft. The exterior door at the bottom of the pool opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. The area between the two doors smells of rotten flesh and is littered with pixelated bones and rags from the balhannoth’s victims. Unlike most of the other shafts in the tube, there are no ladders in this shaft, and the walls are warm and streaked with strange colors. This is Cube 1717’s cannon shaft, which continues some 250 feet down into the heart of the cube (see area 6.28A).

AREA 5.6: FERRY

A few feet from the water along the edge of the beach lies a simple wooden boat that fits up to six people. A long wooden boating pole lies nearby. The boat is in fine condition and seaworthy, though it smells strongly of the Styx sea. Any character who inspects it closely can see that what first appeared to be natural lines in the wood are actually countless names carved into the boat’s plank surface. The boat radiates abjuration to a *detect magic* spell, and it is immune to fire, acid, cold, poison, and lightning damage. The pole radiates

conjunction to a *detect magic* spell, and is a magic item—the *merrenoloth’s oar*, described in the “New Magic Items” appendix.

This place is where the oinoloth and its guards made landfall on the island for the yugoloths’ ill-fated assault. The boat and the *merrenoloth’s oar* are both immune to the pixelating curse. With a successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, a character inspecting the boat recalls the legends of the ferryboats of the River Styx, and can guess that the names scribed into the boat are, in fact, the names of the dead.

FACE 6: FACE OF EVIL

The surface of face 6 appears as a wasteland of rock or bodies with no notable features except its six doors. Though the characters have no way to note this from outside, this is the “master face” with which the cube’s internal gravity is aligned.

Many of the locations within this face are given both pixelated and unpixelated descriptions. The characters can see the latter if they use the *pixel glasses* or temporarily unpixelate part of the room with *dispel magic*, *remove curse*, or Styx water.

See “Running the Adventure,” earlier in this document, for guidelines on how to handle encounters with the defenders of the cube.

AREA 6.1: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, a side passage lined with ladders leads off to area 4.3, while the main shaft continues down 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.8.

If characters coming down from area 6.1 try to walk into area 4.3, they find it unexpectedly difficult as gravity shifts, making area 4.3 appear to be above them. However, the effect is only disorienting—not potentially deadly as it is for characters coming from area 4.3 (see that area’s description for details).

AREA 6.2: INTERIOR DOOR

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, the shaft continues down another 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.9.

AREA 6.3: JUNCTION ROOM

This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 2.2 and area 3.1. A set of *pixel glasses* (see the “New Magic Items” appendix) lie at the bottom of this shaft.

AREA 6.4: JUNCTION ROOM

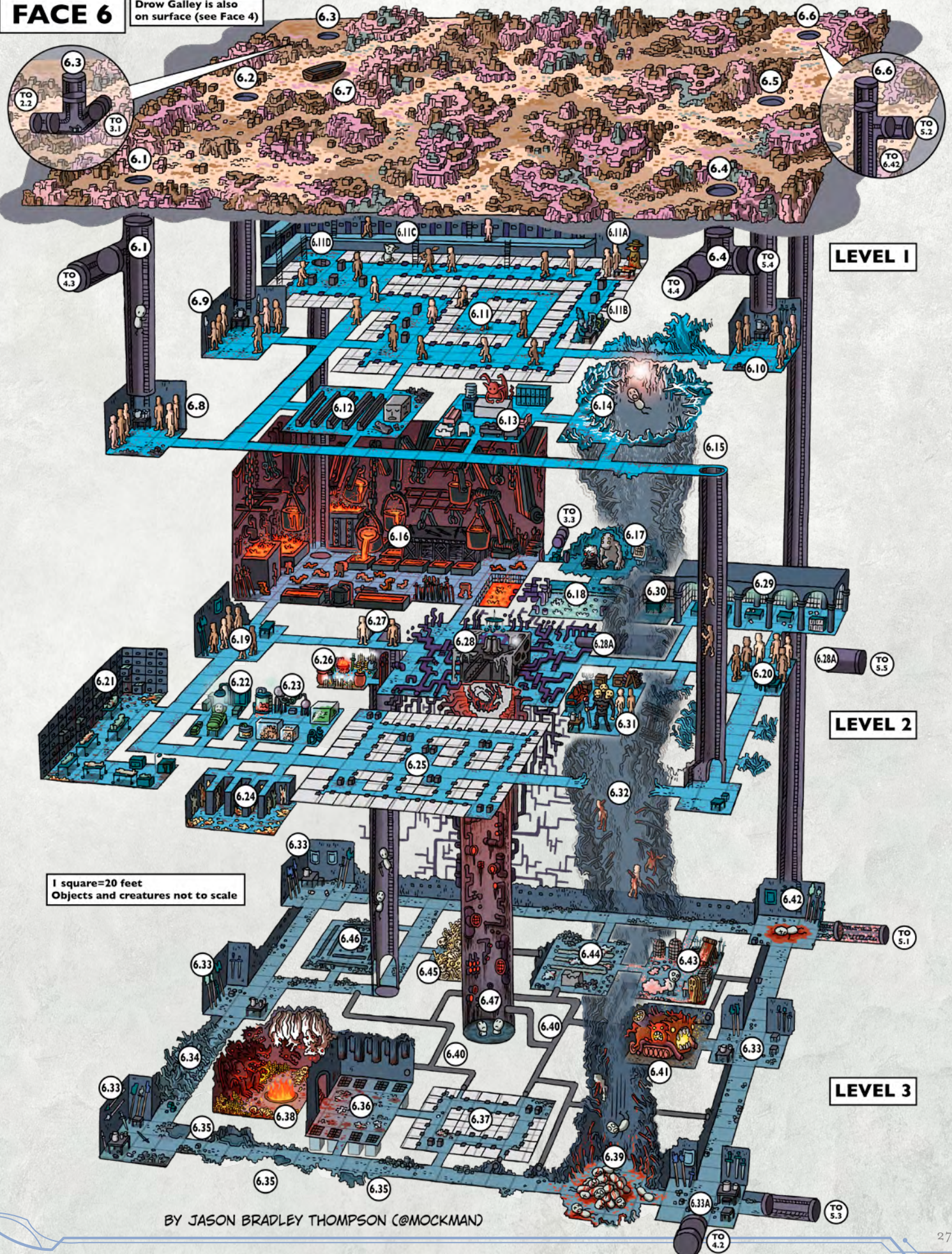
This door leads to a three-way junction room whose shafts lead on to area 4.4 and area 5.4.

AREA 6.5: INTERIOR DOOR

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, the shaft continues down another 60 feet to the lighted room at area 6.10.

FACE 6

Drow Galley is also on surface (see Face 4)



LEVEL 1

LEVEL 2

LEVEL 3

1 square = 20 feet
Objects and creatures not to scale

BY JASON BRADLEY THOMPSON (@MOCKMAN)

AREA 6.6: INTERIOR DOOR AND GRAVITY SWITCH

The exterior door here opens to reveal an interior door 40 feet beyond. Past the interior door, a side passage lined with ladders leads off to area 5.2, while the main shaft continues down into darkness, eventually reaching area 6.42 nearly 600 feet below.

If characters coming down from area 6.6 try to walk into area 5.2, they find it unexpectedly difficult as gravity shifts, making area 5.2 appear to be above them. However, the effect is only disorienting—not potentially deadly as it is for characters coming from area 5.2 (see that area’s description for details).

AREA 6.7: WATERLOGGED BOAT

An ordinary wooden rowboat, similar to any the characters would have seen in the port they started out from, lies here among the cubic landscape, filled nearly to the brim with the murky black water of the Styx sea. The rowboat belonged to a large merchant vessel that recently landed on the island. The hydroloths sunk the ship and killed the crew, but the sunken rowboat was caught in the gravitational pull of face 6. Because it remains full of Styx water, the boat hasn’t pixelated yet.

AREA 6.8: GUARDROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Four iron ladders lead down into a square chamber, lit by panels in the blocky walls that glow with a soft white light. Gray tables, chairs, and benches are made of rectangles and blocks. Vaguely weapon-like items also made of blocks hang on rungs set into the walls. Six faceless, blocky humanoid figures stand against the walls.

Unpixelated. In addition to normal tables, chairs, and benches, this room features walls lined with rivets and pipes, round glass panels that glow with light, and a number of weapons on weapons racks. A water jug, six mugs, some hunks of unidentifiable meat, rulers, calipers, crossbows, bolts, and valueless personal items are scattered about.

Pixelated Guards. The six figures here are three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**—fanatical defenders of the cube who see all nonpixelated beings as grotesque mutants. If the characters don’t seem immediately threatening, the pixelated guards offer to escort them to the reception room (area 6.13). They won’t let anyone roam the cube without escorts. If the characters broke through the interior door or otherwise displayed violent tendencies, five of the guards attack while the sixth goes to alert the skull lord at area 6.31.

AREA 6.9: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.10: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.11: UPPER LEVEL BARRACKS

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This high-ceilinged room resembles a warehouse or a prison cell block, with ladders leading up to several levels of walkways. Along each level are numerous black metal doors fitted with small, square-barred windows. Most windows reveal identical cell-like rooms beyond, each containing only shelves in the walls and a number of large blocks or cubes. One cell along each section of wall is instead empty, and tiled in white. The cell doors have no locks. Blocky machines stand in the central corridor between the rows of cells, and the whole area is lit by white glowing bricks in the walls.

Unpixelated. The individual rooms contain bunk beds, tables, crates, simple toilets, sinks, and other plain furniture. A few hold personal items such as dishes, weapons, and cloth rags.

Warriors’ Quarters. These rooms were previously inhabited by the Acheronian army that inhabited the cube. The many empty rooms contain only valueless personal items. Characters who thoroughly explore the barracks also find occasional cells that contain incomprehensible machinery or pipes leaking magical fluids.

Slime Showers. Each of the white-tiled chambers features a large pixelated drain at the center of its floor, and a large pixelated faucet on the wall. If the faucet is turned, a bubbling sound emerges from the drain, followed by an eruption of white pixelated slime that moves across the floor as if alive. The white slime is a hazard that eats only dead organic material, and is used by the soldiers to clean themselves. If any characters allow the slime to crawl up their bodies, it presses against them to cleanse them of sweat, dead skin, and dirt—along with any nonmagical clothing and gear with an organic origin (including most cloth, leather, and wood). The slime flows back into the drain when its cleaning is done, or if attacked.

Food and Water Dispensers. The blocky machines are fountain-like devices operated by buttons, tubes, and cranks. One dispenses small waxed-paper boxes holding water, which can be pierced open and drunk. The other machine dispenses soft cubes of macerated meat-like pulp made from the flesh of lemures—creatures unworthy of being soldiers and condemned to be eaten by their betters. Unpixelated food takes the form of a sloppy paste instead of a cube. It is harmless to eat, though extremely unappetizing.

Off-Duty Threats. The pixelated guards come here in shifts to eat, drink, and rest. When the characters first arrive, nine pixelated **merregons**^M and nine pixelated **veterans** are resting in rooms or wandering the central corridors. The maximum number of guards here will easily overwhelm even a 13th-level party, so a stealthy approach is warranted—and characters might need to flee if a serious fight breaks out. Additionally, unless the characters are stealthy, creatures in areas 6.11A, 6.11B, or 6.11C hear them when they enter 6.11.

Every 4 hours, six of the guards here switch out with guards in areas 6.8, 6.9, 6.10, 6.19, or 6.20.

AREA 6.11A. OINOLOTH'S ROOM

Malika Tahoun (“Queen Plague”) dwells in this area. The **oinoloth**^M appears as an unpixelated humanoid figure that is completely covered so that none of its flesh is visible. It wears leather robes, a stained apron, leather boots and gloves, and a bird-faced leather mask and helmet with a long beak and two smoked-glass goggles over the eyes. Two pixelated **merregons**^M with halberds stand within 5 feet of it at all times, watching it and preventing it from leaving the cube.

This cell is distinguished from the others by two pixelated bodies on the table inside (playthings of the oinoloth) and a partially pixelated ivory chess set worth 100 gp (a gift from the skull lord). Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 18 or higher smells the blood from the room just passing by through area 6.11. The oinoloth has no treasure. Any mortal foolish enough to wear its leather robes or mask is infected by horrible diseases of your devising.

Fiendish Bargains. Malika surrendered to the skull lord when the rest of the yugoloth away team were killed. The magic suit it wears protects it from the pixelating curse. Respecting it as a potential ally—and unable to claim its plague-ridden head—the skull lord is waiting to see if it becomes necessary to have the oinoloth become part of the Six-Face Throne. The oinoloth is happy to wait—and is hopeful that other yugoloths or Bane’s forces mount a more successful assault on the cube.

Using its telepathy, the oinoloth can communicate with the characters without being overheard by its guards. In the interest of gaining their aid, it uses its Corrupted Healing to heal wounded characters or cure the pixelating curse. This triggers a fight with the attending merregons at once.

The oinoloth knows almost everything the skull lord knows, and can also tell the characters about the *censer of blood* that it lost somewhere on face 5. But if the characters agree to aid it, the selfish and evil oinoloth doesn’t risk its hide in a face-to-face fight with the skull lord or its servants. It instead leaves the cube as soon as possible, taking the censer with it if it can—preferably by killing one or more characters for it.

AREA 6.11B. SLADEK'S ROOM

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the wizard is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter area 6.11. Otherwise, he is in area 6.23.

Sladek is completely pixelated, but he can be easily identified from among the other pixel guards by his blue coloring (from his genasi skin and blue robes) and his tall, conically cubic wizard’s hat. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence (Insight) check makes the connection that this is the mage they’re looking for.

Sladek now willingly serves the skull lord as a trusted advisor, and he happily betrays the party to Vargo even if the characters are former friends or allies. Sladek is a pixelated **mage**, giving him the following changes:

- His alignment is lawful neutral.
- He has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.

Being attuned to the Six-Face Throne, he can also communicate telepathically with the skull lord at any distance.

- He is immune to the frightened condition.
- He has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

If Sladek casts any spells that produce a visual effect, that effect is pixelated.

Wizard’s Work. A pixelated *driftglobe* lights the room, which is filled with pixelated wizards’ equipment. Sladek’s spellbook (identifiable as a large violet book but illegible unless unpixelated) sits on his chair. Tables in the room have been set up with alchemical equipment, with which Sladek studies the interactions of different types of pixelated matter. The equipment is visible as pixelated glass tubes in which pixelated liquids stir and pixelated green, red, and blue flames flicker. The equipment can be used or sold as alchemist’s supplies.

In one corner of the room, a small chest is inscribed with a *glyph of warding* that is impossible to see when the chest is pixelated. When unpixelated, it can be found with a successful DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Opening the chest triggers the *glyph’s cloudkill* spell. Within the chest are a *potion of healing*, two *potions of climbing*, and a *spell scroll of control water*.

AREA 6.11C: SIMAK'S ROOM

The drow captain Simak is found lurking in her cell when the characters pass through this area. She is here whenever she is not playing court jester to Vargo. After seeing her forces annihilated by the skull lord and its servants, she escaped the same fate only by pretending to have been rendered an entertaining idiot by the effects of the Styx sea. Amused, Vargo lets her wander the cube freely, but the pixelated guards have orders to not let her reach the surface.

Simak knows the skull lord’s plans and the oinoloth’s powers. She looks constantly for any opportunity to escape the cube, and might reveal her subterfuge to the characters if she thinks they might help her. Naturally, she betrays them immediately if doing so helps her escape.

Simak is a **drow house captain** (see *Mordenkainen’s Tome of Foes*) with the following changes:

- Her Intelligence is 14 and she has Deception +5.
- She has a +1 bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls with her magic weapons (see below).
- She also carries a mundane poisoned dagger hidden in her boot: +8 to hit; 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) poison damage.

Simak has become aware that her *amulet of the Styx* is the reason she has not pixelated like other creatures. (See the “New Magic Items” appendix for details on the amulet.) She also wears a white spider-silk cape (300 gp), a chrysoberyl ring (150 gp), and an alexandrite ring (600 gp), and she carries a pouch holding *oil of slipperiness*, three doses of assassin’s blood poison, and five doses of drow poison. See chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for information on poisons.

Simak's *+1 hand crossbow*, *+1 scimitar*, and *+1 whip*, all clearly of drow make, are hidden under some pixelated rags beneath the lower bunk.

AREA 6.11D: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the upper and middle levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

AREA 6.12: TEMPLE OF THE CUBE

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This blocky chamber has an arched cathedral-like roof, lit by partially hidden glowing white wall panels high in the nave. Long black rectangular benches face a huge gray block with the crude outline of a noseless face engraved on all its visible sides. Lying on its side in the back of the chamber is a smaller blocky statue of black metal, apparently depicting an armored humanoid.

Unpixelated. The room is a temple, with an elaborate cathedral roof and black pews facing the central object of worship. This place was once a temple to Bane, the god of tyranny, whom the fallen statue depicts as a tall man in dark knightly armor. The statue has been desecrated and replaced with a recently forged statue of the Archquadrone. However, hymns to Bane in Infernal are still scribed on the walls.

A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies the new steel statue as resembling the body of a quadrone without its arms, legs, and wings. Its face has a lordly expression, as if about to speak a command.

Once per day on a regular schedule, all the pixelated guards come here to pray. Each time the characters enter this area, roll a d6. On a 1, three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans** are here, rapt in worship and easy to surprise.

AREA 6.13: RECEPTION ROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This room is lit by glowing white squares in the ceiling and floor. Several angular chairs and divans face a crude, blocky metal desk on a square dais, behind which sits a high-backed blocky chair. A red-skinned, naked humanoid sits in the high-backed chair, possessed of a grotesque, hairless head and long bat wings.

Behind the desk are numerous cabinets and chests of drawers, and a strange, blocky machine. Crudely angular gray statues stand about the room, with a vague resemblance to humanoids in armor.

Unpixelated. This place has the appearance of a mundane waiting room—except for the features appropriate to the Lower Planes. The statues depict Bane, Loviatar, and other mighty lawful evil beings. The cabinets and chests are filled with writing instruments, paperwork, and scrolls in Infernal listing the names of countless dead souls who ended up in Acheron due to their service (conscious

or otherwise) of Bane, Loviatar, and Tiamat—the lords of tyranny, cruelty, and greed. The machine is a water dispenser (see area 6.11). Despite their angular appearance, the chairs and divans are quite comfortable.

Welcoming Committee. The bat-winged humanoid is Bunch, a **berbalang**^M ally of the skull lord. Bunch is resistant to the pixelating curse because of the creature's extraplanar nature. Though it has the appearance of a devil, the berbalang is not a fiend at all. Rather, it came to the cube for the vast wealth of bodies upon it, which it plunders for the chance to speak with the dead. It gladly agreed to assist the skull lord and its pixelated servants in exchange for access to these riches, which it gathers in area 6.45.

When the characters arrive here, the berbalang is working where the bureaucrats of the cube once sorted new arrivals to Acheron, welcoming them to an afterlife of eternal servitude and war. It welcomes the adventurers as if mistaking them for dead souls, asking them what they did when they were alive, what they would like to do in their new existence in the afterlife, and so on.

The berbalang's seemingly misguided questions have an evil design. It was been charged by Vargo with noting and delivering any intelligent visitors that have come to the cube, so that the skull lord can steal their skulls to activate more faces of the Six-Face Throne (see area 6.28). The berbalang takes special note of wizard characters, and might also ask other characters to take



“intelligence tests.” (These tests can be summarized quickly, represented by a few clever riddles, or turned into a long comedy sequence, as you desire.)

When the *berbalang* has learned all it can from the characters, it suggests they might like to rest and offers them a room in area 6.11 or area 6.25. If they ask to talk to someone in charge, it offers to introduce them to Vargo, the lord of the cube. If the characters seem like they might cause trouble, the *berbalang* tells them that Vargo can teleport them back to their homes—and sets up a masterful plan of deceit. See area 6.25 for more information.

If the characters attack the *berbalang*, it fights back but flees as quickly as it can to alert Vargo. If Bunch ever faces the characters again, it uses its Spectral Duplicate feature to hide in a safe place while the duplicate fights.

AREA 6.14: SOUL TAP

As the characters approach this room, they hear a sudden scream that quickly fades away. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Some great disaster has torn this chamber apart. Everything that remains has a crudely blocky appearance, as if shaped of thousands of black metal cubes. Huge rends in the metal walls expose massive steel girders and pipes whose blocky lengths are bent and twisted. Red steam spills out of the pipes, and red glowing bricks in the walls blink and flash erratically. The floor, once covered in square white tiles, is split open to an enormous hole opening up to darkness far below, and edged with blocky, twisted girders and pipes. Multicolored squares of tile cover the ceiling.

Unpixelated. The room looks much the same, though the twisted girders and pipes are revealed to be viciously jagged. The remnants of great machines stand along the edges of the room, likewise smashed beyond recognition. The tiles in the ceiling are a mosaic incorporating symbols of order, reincarnation, and rebirth. With a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Religion) check, a character recognizes ceremonial designs showing the Great Wheel that represents the position of the planes. Characters who can read Infernal or Primordial note sigils praising cosmic law and justice, and talking of how order must be obeyed even when it seems cruel or arbitrary.

Long Way Down. When the characters first enter this area, a pulse of light appears in the center of the room, directly below the Great Wheel image in the ceiling. Within the light, a naked humanoid appears in midair, then immediately screams as they plummet down the hole in the floor and vanish into darkness. A character near the edge who listens with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check hears the scream abruptly stop and a crunching sound from below.

Every six seconds, this spectacle repeats itself, with another figure appearing in the air and falling to their death. All are naked adults but vary in gender, race, and culture, including humans, gnomes, dwarves, the occasional goblinoid, and pale dwarves the characters

might recognize as *duergar*. All are doomed to die as they fall some 400 feet to area 6.39.

Interrupted Fall. The characters might attempt to rescue one or more of the falling individuals, using spells such as *feather fall* or *telekinesis*. Creatures saved from their fate are confused and have no idea where they are. All are lawful evil (or occasionally lawful neutral) individuals who died and have been reborn in new bodies resembling the ones they used to have. They know nothing about Acheron except what they might have heard in legends, and might be surprised to be told they’ve ended up there. Each creature has **veteran** statistics, adjusted for the lack of weapons and armor.

If the characters figure out a way to rescue large numbers of reborn souls (for example, by creating a solid structure to bridge the open center of the room), they discover to their peril that these humanoids all transform to pixelated **veterans** within 1 hour of wandering around the cube. If you don’t want to deal with the complication of hundreds of new guards joining the ranks of the skull lord’s servants, you might decide that the soul tap’s corrupted magic causes some or all of them to drop dead or vanish a few minutes after they appear.

Souls on Tap. A *detect magic* spell identifies powerful divine magic and transmutation in this area, centered in the pulsing light where the bodies appear. This room was the second most important site in Cube 1717 after the engine room: the place where the souls of lawful evil dead were reborn to be assigned new duties in area 6.13. When the *yugoloths* invaded the cube, they destroyed this area to shut off the flow of souls. But when the Six-Face Throne was activated, so was the soul tap. Only destroying the Heart Engine (see area 6.28) or a *wish* spell can turn it off now.

Characters who observe the damaged floor and walls see that they are slowly rebuilding themselves. If the characters are unable to destroy the Heart Engine before the floor of the room grows back in one week, it will once again provide the skull lord with an endless stream of new recruits.

Climbing the Girders. Descending the mangled girders and pipes is difficult and dangerous. Climbing the 200 feet between this area and area 6.32 requires four successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks (one for every 50 feet climbed). On a failed check, a character slips and falls, plummeting up to 400 feet to area 6.39 and taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage. A character who sees the area as pixelated has disadvantage on the check.

With each successful check, a character still takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage from the jagged metal along the descent path.

AREA 6.15: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the upper and middle levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

AREA 6.16: ACHERON'S ARMORY

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This cavernous room is hotter than the corridors outside. Cubic steel terraces are stacked with blocky caricatures of weapons, while gleaming shields and armor are set on racks across the floor, all appearing as though forged of jagged cubes. The heat in the chamber comes from large furnaces venting pixelated smoke and flame. Blue and white glowing bricks in the walls and ceiling illuminate the room. Several small pixelated creatures wander near the furnaces.

Unpixelated. These chambers contain weapons and armor of all descriptions—enough to outfit an army, and all forged by duergar smiths or shaped by gnome crafters. Anvils, tongs, hammers, and other tools lie scattered about.

Fiery Exits. Numerous pipes extend from the furnaces to disappear into the walls where they lead to other areas. These pipes range from 2 feet to 5 feet across, with the largest pipes connecting to the Heart Engine at area 6.28. At your discretion, creatures with immunity to fire damage might be able to creep through the pipes into other areas.

Arms and Armor. The characters can claim any kind of nonmagical medium or heavy armor they want from this area (including hide armor made from the skin of Acheronian beasts), as well as nonmagical weapons of any type. Characters who spend some time searching the farthest corners of the chamber also find multiple examples of siege equipment (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*; size Huge or smaller only).

Clockworks. The gnomish clockworks that infest face 2 were made here by the mad derro architect Avnas and her pupils. Several of those constructs still crawl and rattle along near the forges: three **oaken bolters**^M, ten **bronze scouts**^M, and four **iron cobras**^M, all pixelated.

The iron cobras and oaken bolters attack nonpixelated creatures on sight unless commanded not to by an intelligent pixelated creature. Unless they are attacked, the bronze scouts crawl within 5 feet of intruders, harmlessly sniff them, then wander off.

If the characters destroy all the clockworks here and return to the room later, another 1d6 + 1 pixelated **bronze scouts**^M will have crawled out from hiding to behave as noted above.

Any noise of battle in this room is audible to creatures in area 6.19 or area 6.28.

AREA 6.17: AVNAS'S LAIR

If they have not been encountered and killed already, there is a 50 percent chance that Avnas and her gray

render pet are in this area when the characters come here. They are otherwise wandering elsewhere in the cube, including on the surface (see "Random Surface Encounters").

The door to this area from area 6.16 is blocked by a heap of black, blue, and gray metallic cubes that make it appear as though the walls have collapsed. However, any character who inspects these cubes sees that they are not made of metal as they appear to be, but are simply heavy paper covered with metallic paint.

Moving the cubes reveals a 5-foot-wide circular iron hatch that resembles a smaller, handmade version of the huge doors on the cube's exterior. The door is unpixelated and has an unpixelated handprint lock at its center. Both the hatch and the lock are painted with wild arabesque designs and symbols of chaos.

Unlike the regular doors that open to the handprint of a lawful creature, this hatch opens only if the handprint of a chaotic creature (living or dead) is pressed into the lock. Alternatively, characters can batter their way through the hatch, which has AC 17, 30 hit points, and immunity to psychic and poison damage. However, doing so alerts Avnas and the gray render if they are here.

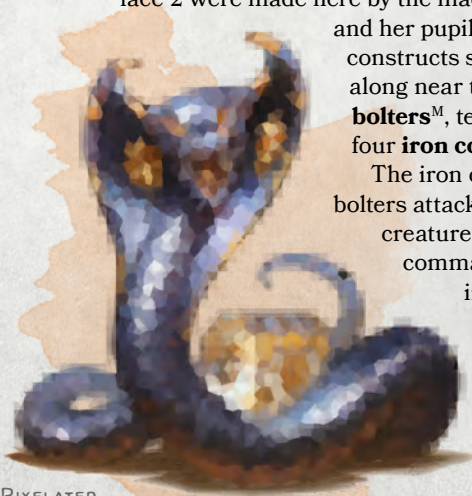
Beyond the door stands a comfortable, cluttered lair and workspace. Unlike the geometric corridors outside, the surfaces of this room are twisted into fabulous curves, ripples, and whorls. This area remains unpixelated as a result of the chaotic energy focused in Avnas's work. It is set with a four-poster bed whose soft mattress is stuffed with plump bat wings, a drafting table, numerous torture devices, comfortable armchairs and divans, a mirror, and a kitchen area where Avnas prepares and cooks homemade sausage. A pile of human, gnome, and duergar bones are the remains of the gray render's food. Several blobby cubical objects set around the place are the pixelated heads of dead enemies, which Avnas talks to as if they were alive.

Avnas and Moxon. This area is home to Avnas, the **derro savant**^M who designed Cube 1717. She has the appearance of a scrawny, deformed dwarf of indeterminate age, with huge white eyes and a tangle of gray hair. On a chain around her neck, she wears the pixelated severed hand of a lawful hobgoblin, used to open the cube's doors. Avnas also carries a *+1 quarterstaff*, as well as numerous bags and pouches containing tinker's tools, jeweler's tools, mason's tools, smith's tools, polyhedral dice, and 850 gp worth of small gems. The derro is infected with the pixelating curse, picked up on one of her many trips outside this area. But she is just beginning to pixelate, with cubic growths visible on her hands and chin.

Avnas is accompanied everywhere by her huge, vicious pet Moxon—a **gray render**^M that serves her



PIXELATED OAKEN BOLTER



PIXELATED
IRON COBRA

faithfully and attacks anyone who threatens her. Moxon is fully pixelated.

Works of Madness. Formerly one of the few chaotic creatures in Acheron, Avnas's mechanical engineering skills quickly made her a prized servant of Earl Andromalius, who coveted her clockworks and machines. Earl Andromalius gifted the derro with a dread magic item called the *book of patterns* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix). The evil dreams bestowed upon the derro by that tome inspired the experiments that turned the quadrone into the Archquadrone and started the pixelating curse.

With the progression of the curse slowed in Avnas because of her chaotic nature, she survived the cataclysm that followed. By the time she emerged from her hiding place, Vargo had created the Six-Face Throne and taken control of the cube. Pledging allegiance at sword point to the skull lord, Avnas is nominally an ally of the "new earl." But she mostly wanders the cube in a state of awe, fascinated by the pixelating curse and the bodies, arms, and armor she has to experiment with.

Avnas is dangerously insane and constantly switches personality traits. Every time the characters meet her, roll a d6 and consult the following table to see how she acts.

d6 Avnas's Personality

- 1 The derro is completely obsessed with some piece of weapon, armor, or machinery. She ignores the characters, muttering to herself. If the characters persistently bother her, Moxon attacks them.
- 2 Avnas is homicidal and paranoid. Seeing the characters as her prey, she stalks and attacks them.
- 3 Convinced that the characters are undead slaves of the skull lord, Avnas rudely commands them to help her dig through bodies or perform some other menial task.
- 4 Avnas is mostly lucid, seeing the characters as threats but curious about how things have changed on the Material Plane since she came to Acheron. She asks about obscure figures of derro culture from thousands of years before. If the characters change the topic, she tries to misdirect them into the clutches of nearby pixelated guards, the balhannoth, or another enemy.
- 5 The derro scratches at the cubes on her face and hands, desperate as she asks the characters for help getting them off. If the characters cure her of the pixelating curse, roll a d6 again to determine her reaction. Thereafter, reroll this result if Avnas is free of the curse.
- 6 Avnas is unfailingly polite and enthusiastic. She answers any questions about Cube 1717 while eagerly engaging the characters in conversation about the wonders of the pixelating curse. (This personality results from the pixelating curse beginning to affect her brain. Reroll this result if Avnas is free of the curse.)

Along with the skull lord, Avnas is one of the only creatures in Cube 1717 who knows the whole story of what brought the cube to the material plane. However,

even she doesn't understand exactly how the dreams sent to her by the *book of patterns* transformed the quadrone and created the pixelating curse. She sees everything as an exciting new experiment, from torture to death to becoming a pixelated creature. Her sociopathic narcissism and self-destructive tendencies make it impossible for the derro to become a true ally of the characters, no matter what they might offer her.

Drafting Table. This metal table and the shelves around it are covered with rulers, styluses, and drafting equipment. A **stone defender**^M stands near the table, inscribed with notes and sketches in Abyssal. Avnas uses the construct as a bulletin board, and it is programmed to attack anyone who goes near the drafting table. If Avnas is in the room, she can command the stone defender to attack intruders.

Canvas scrolls spread across the table show Avnas's architectural plans for the fortresses and barracks she was commissioned to make, as well as her dream projects—insane buildings combining the shapes of flowers, intestines, and seashells.

With a search of this area and a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, a character recognizes Avnas's plans for a huge cubic fortress as depicting the very fortress they are in. The plans show the overall layout of the fortress's faces (including the doors on each face, but not the threats currently found there). It shows all the rooms beneath each face, although not the names or contents of those rooms.

Avnas's Dice Collection. A set of shelves and a table in one corner of the room contain Avnas's treasures—shining, glowing polyhedral objects of all colors, shapes, and sizes, each with its faces marked by numeric symbols. Some are made of stone, others of metal or jewels. Some are sculpted of layered lizard skin. Some are ochre jellies magically kept at a low temperature to keep them solid. On the table stand dice towers, scales, and spiraling glass tubes used to test dice. The floor around the table is scrawled with invocations praising Demogorgon, Juiblex, and the other demon lords.

Avnas's collection of dice weighs 200 pounds in total. Most are merely curiosities, but any character who spends 30 minutes to sort through the collection identifies 50 pounds of valuable dice worth a total of 12,000 gp. The largest of these is a d12 carved from a petrified roc's egg.

Additionally, five unique dice are hidden among the rest:

Eye Die: When this translucent d4 is rolled as an action, the creature rolling it must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution save or have their face transform as their number of eyes changes to the number rolled on the die. A *remove curse* spell restores the creature's normal number of eyes, or they can reroll until they get the desired number. Additional eyes grant a creature no benefit.

Skull Die: This d6 is carved of demon bone and has a skull in place of the 1. When it is rolled as an action, a number of creatures within 60 feet (as determined by the roll) must each succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or take 35 (10d6) necrotic damage.

Creatures are affected in order from those with the lowest hit points to the highest.

Dice Quasits: An oversized dice cup on the table is covered by a stack of books. Inside the cup are three dice quasits (see the sidebar). When they hear the characters, they call out in wheedling, whiny voices to be released, promising to serve anyone who frees them.

AREA 6.18: AVNAS'S FORGE

Like area 6.17, this area remains unpixelated because of the chaotic clockwork energy it channels. This hot, poorly ventilated chamber contains a makeshift forge connected by pipes to the larger forge at area 6.16. The fire burns blue here due to the chemicals Avnas uses in her work. A creature with fire immunity might be able to creep through the pipes that connect the two forges.

A number of nonworking clockwork creations are scattered around the room, including constructs shaped of sword blades, corkscrews, and jagged drill bits; booby-trapped armor that lops off its wearer's head or explodes when a belt-buckle is pushed; and fragmented metal limbs that crawl around. If the characters search the room thoroughly, they awaken three **iron cobras**^M that attack.

AREA 6.19: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.20: GUARDROOM

This area is identical to area 6.8, and contains three pixelated **merregons**^M and three pixelated **veterans**.

AREA 6.21: MORGUE

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. The room is cold, and the white glowing bricks in the wall glow dimly. Numerous long tables fill the area, and the walls are lined with large drawers, some open. Most of the tables are covered with blocky humanoid figures whose flesh is gray or yellow, and which is marked by irregular ridges, gaps, and holes. Similar figures lie in the drawers. In one corner of the room is a white tub 10 feet across. The tub is streaked with square scales of brown-gray slime, has a large grated drain, and features a crown of square gray pipes hanging from the ceiling above it. A faint smell of decay

DICE QUASIT

A rare variant among its demonic kind, a dice **quasit** can use its shapechanging ability to transform into what appears to be a large gaming die shaped of metal or stone. In this form, the dice quasit can see its surroundings, can speak, and can move by hopping or scuttling.

When rolled in its dice form, a dice quasit has a certain amount of control over the result of the roll. It is thus a perfect companion for a cheating gambler—especially as it does not radiate magic as enchanted dice would. A character using the dice quasit in a game has advantage on any ability checks made as part of the game. A dice quasit is always eager to serve a master—but it always attempts to corrupt that master, goading them into ever-greater acts of risk-taking, chaos, and evil.

STYX MIST

Vargo has deemed it advantageous for certain areas of the cube to not become pixelated. To accomplish this, the skull lord had Avnas set up a number of jury-rigged systems of pipes and pumps that constantly mist Styx water into the air.

In areas that are Styx misted, the pipes and pumps are noticeable where they run along the ceiling and walls, terminating in a large bucket of Styx water periodically refilled by pixelated guards. The Styx-water mist makes everything in an area damp and dripping. Pixelated creatures find the mist unpleasant but not harmful. Exposure to the mist is of no benefit to creatures under the effect of the pixelating curse, though the bucket of Styx water can be used to end the curse as normal.

fills the room except near the tub, which carries the scent of lye.

Unpixelated. The metal slabs and wall drawers of this morgue are mostly filled with human, hobgoblin, and duergar dead. Stripped of valuables and partially dissected, they number a hundred or more.

Every body in the room is an undead creature, culled from the endless supply of bodies at area 6.39 and raised by the skull lord using necromantic rituals. In total, forty-three pixelated **skeletons** and seventy-four pixelated **zombies** are here. Each has the following changes to its normal statistics:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The zombies and skeletons normally lie immobile until commanded to action by the skull lord. However, if the characters destroy more than six bodies, the rest of the undead all rise on the next round and attack. If Vargo is not present, the undead do not pursue characters out of the room.

Acid Bath. The tub is an automated body disposal device. Whenever an object is placed in the tub (or a creature steps into it), a deluge of acid pours down from the pipes above. This deals 21 (6d6) acid damage to the creature at the start of each of its turns. A dead body in the tub is dissolved and drained away to nothing in 2d4 rounds.

AREA 6.22: SURGERY

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the pixelated **mage** is 50 percent likely to be found here, doing his own alchemical experiments or assisting with the skull lord's. See area 6.11B for more information on the mage.

This room of blue and green tile is kept damp and unpixelated by a Styx-water spraying device (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar).

Bright light fills this area from two *driftglobes* that hover in the center of the room, as well as glowing panels on the wall. Half the room is dominated by a surgical table. Around it, cabinets hold knives, scalpels, and other medical equipment. Sinks along one wall

produce a flow or shower of normal water. A closet contains surgical smocks, while another closet is filled with severed heads—victims of the skull lord’s surgeries. A third closet contains twenty vials of special acid that dissolves flesh but does not harm bone or brain tissue.

In one cabinet near the surgical area are Vargo’s notes, written in Infernal in two styles of handwriting (for two of its heads). Short and unembellished, the notes describe experiments designed to allow the skull lord to add new heads to its body—as well as speculation on the most effective means of determining a creature’s intelligence.

AREA 6.23: LABORATORY

If he has not been encountered already, Sladek the pixelated **mage** is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter. See area 6.11B for more information on the mage.

This room is kept damp and unpixelated by a Styx-water spraying device (see the “Styx Mist” sidebar). The huge chamber is dominated by alchemical equipment: beakers, flasks and alembics, bubbling liquids, and strange slow-moving flames of various colors. Additionally, several glass-and-steel tanks hold living experiments—the horrible remnants of the fiendish work once carried out here. Breaking any of the tanks requires a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check.

Green Slime. If the glass is broken, all creatures within 5 feet of the tank must succeed on a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or be covered by a mass of green slime. More slime erupts out to cover an area 5 feet on a side at the center of the room. On initiative count 10 starting the following round, the slime spreads 5 feet horizontally and vertically until it covers an area 15 feet on a side. See “Dungeon Hazards” in chapter 5 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* for information on green slime.

Ochre Jelly. If the glass of its tank is shattered, this **ochre jelly** attacks.

Oblex Spawn. This tank is filled with red slime that constantly heaves and changes shape, sending forth limbs that melt back into the mass. If any character examines the slime for more than a few moments, it presses up against the glass as it forms a mushy caricature of that character’s face. If the glass is shattered, the slime is released as an **oblex spawn**^M.

Spiked Creature. This tank contains a water dispenser and food dispenser similar to those in area 6.11. In the opposite corner is what appears to be an earthen lump of light brown pyramidal spikes, about the size of a small barrel.

If the characters approach the tank, the mass rises to its feet and presses itself against the glass nearest to them. It has a vaguely humanoid form with arms and legs, but no facial features or visible eyes—only perfectly triangular spikes. The unknown creature then scratches on the glass as it watches the characters walk around the room.

A *true seeing* spell reveals that the spike creature is a human infected by a disease developed in this laboratory—something similar to the pixelating curse. The creature desires humanoid contact though it cannot speak. A *dispel magic* or *cure disease* spell

returns it to normal, but the human is quite mad from being kept in this state for many years. If subject to a *greater restoration* spell, the character is cured and can communicate. Full immersion in the Styx sea also cures both the disease and the madness. If this unfortunate test subject is cured, who they are and how they came to be here is left for you to determine.

Hand Creature. This tank contains a water dispenser and food dispenser similar to those in area 6.11. Pacing back and forth in the tank is a pink creature with two arms and two legs whose body is covered with hands. The creature’s face, feet, elbows, shoulders, and thighs are festooned with hands, with no facial features visible.

As with the spiked creature, a *true seeing* spell reveals that this is a human subject of terrible experiments. The creature is completely lost in its own world, and it paces in circles even if its glass tank is broken. It can be cured of its affliction in the same manner as the spiked creature (see above). If cured, the unfortunate character’s origin and identity are left to you to determine.

AREA 6.24: MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON

This room was used as a prison for creatures that had offended Earl Andromalius in some way. When the pixelating curse overtook Cube 1717, the pixelated soldiers released the prisoners here—including the skull lord, Vargo.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Numerous deep oubliettes are set into the floor throughout this room, whose unpleasant, glaring white light comes from glowing white bricks in the walls. The mouths of the oubliettes are blocked by cubic gray metal bars, most of which appear to be bent and damaged. Some of the bars are covered with a decorative mosaic pattern. A gray box connected to blocky pipes is attached to the wall between the doors.

Unpixelated. The gray metal box contains numerous wires, switches, and buttons that once opened and closed the barred doors of the oubliettes. The mosaic markings on the bars are Infernal inscriptions, noting the crimes for which prisoners were incarcerated. If the characters read all the writing on the bars, they discover Vargo the skull lord’s cell, whose bars read: “*CRIMES: Sedition, sedition, sedition • PUNISHMENTS: Decapitated and heads fused into one body; raised; 1 million life sentences.*”

Empty Prison. Characters looking inside the oubliettes see that they are 30 feet deep and note their foul scent. Pixelated chains hang from the walls 10 feet below the top of each pit, from which prisoners were once hung by their extremities.

In some cells, the bodies of prisoners still hang from the chains. In others, those bodies have rotted and fallen apart. Though the dead are pixelated, it’s clear that all were the unfortunate subjects of cruel magic experiments at the hands of Earl Andromalius.

AREA 6.25: MIDDLE-LEVEL BARRACKS

This area is identical to area 6.11, set up as an open space lined with multiple layers of cell-like rooms once

inhabited by the cube's Acheronian soldiers. Some of the cells contain minor personal items that once belonged to the dead, but nothing else of interest. (Vargo doesn't yet have enough soldiers to need this level of the barracks).

Welcome Home. If the skull lord becomes aware of the characters' presence in the cube but the situation doesn't immediately turn into a fight, it uses this area as a prison to hold the intruders (see "The Skull Lord's Plan")—but with a dark twist. Using the authority over all pixelated creatures that comes from being attuned to the Six-Face Throne, the skull lord commands the balhannoth and the adult oblex (see face 5 and *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on those creatures). Using its telepathic and reality-warping powers, the balhannoth turns this area into an exact duplicate of a real place one of the characters most wants to be: their hometown, their favorite tavern, the port town they were in before they came to the island, or even some place of respite the character has only ever dreamed of visiting.

To carry out this plan, the skull lord or one of its allies (most likely Bunch the berbalang or Sladek the pixelated mage) engages the characters in negotiations or distracting small talk for the 10 minutes

it takes for the balhannoth to transform the area. The characters are then told that a dimensional portal in the cube can take them home, whereupon they are led to area 6.25. As soon as they pass through the doorway into this area, that doorway disappears behind them.

Everything in the new environment appears to be real. Moreover, the characters are also greeted by up to 1d4 + 1 people or creatures that seem to belong at the new location—all of them manifested by the oblex. If the area would normally have a larger group of people, they are unexpectedly absent or show up later, but no more than two to five other creatures are ever seen at the same time.

In reality, the characters remain in the barracks as transformed by the balhannoth. The skull lord simply wants them to waste time figuring out how to get out of this false environment while the pixelating curse overcomes them.

Among the many things likely to give away the false nature of this homecoming, any object created by the balhannoth is clearly a fake. Books turn out to be filled with blank paper, mechanical devices are crude, nonfunctioning duplicates, gold and jewels turn out to be made of paste or tin, and so forth. Characters who move to the edge of the area also quickly discover that it has fixed boundaries, as the balhannoth has reshaped the barracks' existing walls to hem them in.

The faint sulfur smell of the oblex can also be noted around any of its simulacra with a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. Because the oblex has no knowledge of NPCs known to the characters, the absence of such NPCs at the false location is also a giveaway.

If the characters attack the simulacra or discover the balhannoth where it hides within some feature of the false location, both the balhannoth and the oblex attack at once and summon nearby pixelated guards to aid them.

If one or more characters reach mental level 3 of the pixelating curse while in this area, the balhannoth telepathically fills them in on the plan. Players of those characters can be encouraged to secretly roleplay this development, joining in on deceiving the other characters and keeping them in the false location while the pixelating curse runs its course.

AREA 6.26: TREASURY

The 20-foot-tall door to this room is inscribed with a carving of the five heads of Tiamat, still recognizable despite their pixelation. The door is locked, and features a large keyhole covered with pixelated dragon designs. A *glyph of warding* inscribed upon the door by the skull lord can be noted only with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check. It triggers a *finger of death* spell (save DC 18) upon any creature except the skull lord that touches the door.

The door opens only to a key the skull lord wears around its neck, but it can be picked with a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools. It can also be attacked (it has the same statistics as the exterior doors of the cube).



Beyond the door, the features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This chamber is filled with heaps of yellow and silver blocks, as well as scale-like flat squares that shine in the light of glowing white sticks. Barrel-shaped white objects hold more blocks, transparent and shining in blue, green, and violet. Blocky caricatures of weapons, shields, armor, and helmets hang against the walls or are stacked in heaps. A pixelated haze hangs in the air, emanating from glowing cubes in a blocky red brazier.

Unpixelated. The room is filled with piles of coins, urns holding colorful gleaming gems, strange armor, and weapons. Smoke pours from red coals in a squat brazier in the form of a devil's head, which appears to be carved from a single red gem. Numerous white candles fill the room with light.

Poor Welcome. Any unfortunate thieves exploring the treasury must immediately contend with the fact that the entire room is filled with poison gas from the incense in the devilish brazier. Any creature that starts its turn in the room must succeed on a DC 18 Constitution saving throw or take 21 (6d6) poison damage and become poisoned until it leaves the room. A creature that holds its breath gets no benefit against the poison. If the door to area 6.28 is left open, the poison gas dissipates after 10 minutes.

Once the property of a great lord of Acheron, the treasury contains ancient riches from dozens of forgotten empires. The heaps of coins total 35,000 gp, 120,000 sp, and 42,000 cp. Several marble urns are completely filled with gems—mostly star sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and blue spinels—totaling 170 pounds and 108,000 gp in value. (A character who spends an action to scoop up a handful from any urn gathers gems worth $1d4 \times 1,000$ gp.) The devil brazier is carved from a single gigantic piece of rose quartz. It weighs 500 pounds and is worth 15,000 gp.

The finely decorated arms and armor include *+1 chain mail*, *chain mail of resistance (necrotic)*, *scale mail mariner's armor*, *+1 plate mail*, a *sentinel shield*, a *vicious longsword*, a *+2 longsword*, a *+2 spear*, a *greatsword of vengeance*, a *horn of Valhalla (bronze)*, and a *helm of teleportation*. These magic items are scattered among many nonmagical items of the same kind, and are easily spotted when the mundane items are seen in their pixelated state.

Each of the ten white candles in the room has a *continual flame* spell cast upon it.

AREA 6.27: LADDER SHAFT

A 20-foot-wide shaft with ladders on all four sides runs some 200 feet between the middle and lower levels beneath face 6. When Cube 1717 was fully functional, magic in the shaft allowed freight and important individuals to levitate up and down, but that magic has failed.

Two pixelated **veterans** stand beside the ladders, guarding this shaft from potential intruders. If they see any nonpixelated creatures climbing up from below

or in area 6.28, they telepathically alert the guards in area 6.19.

AREA 6.28: CONTROL ROOM

The beating of the Archquadrone's heart can be heard in the corridors leading up to this chamber, and is loud within.

The pixelating curse is stronger here than in the rest of the cube. While in area 6.28, creatures must make all checks and saving throws related to the curse every 10 minutes, rather than at the end of each short rest. The appearance of this chamber also cannot be unpixelated, even with Styx water, *pixel glasses*, or other magic.

This vast square chamber lies at the exact center of the cube. Pipes, valves, and gears cover the riveted iron walls here, occasionally moving, pumping, or hissing as they release strange-smelling steam. Red lights glow from red bricks on the wall. The room is totally pixelated and has no curved surfaces.

The skeletal remains of the Archquadrone fill the center of the room. They resemble little more than a 60-foot-wide dilapidated square framework of what looks like rotting sheet metal, and which shows only hints of the Archquadrone's face and empty eye sockets. Clearly visible through the vast rents in the Archquadrone's remains is the 10-foot-wide Heart Engine, which pumps at the center of the floor. The engine is perched over a wide pit that is bridged by pipes thick enough to walk upon. The pipes go everywhere, disappearing into the walls and floor.

A short flight of metal steps leads 10 feet above the Heart Engine to a metal platform. Two pieces of bulbous machinery squat there, with a large glowing cube floating between them. On the other side of the platform is a large panel of buttons, switches, and levers. A strange piece of furniture at the center of the platform resembles six chairs in a circle sitting back to back, with a crown of piping above them. This is the Six-Face Throne.

The Archquadrone's Remains. Little is left of the Archquadrone except for its heart and the shell of its skull. A character who saw the statue in area 6.12 recognizes it as the same creature. The remains can be confirmed as belonging to an enormously large and limbless quadrone with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check.

The Archquadrone's body can be damaged by any attack, but it's already dead. The Heart Engine must be attacked directly. However, a creature that touches any part of the remains and uses *detect thoughts*, *speak with dead*, telepathy, or a similar effect receives fragmentary images of the life of the Archquadrone and its desire to reshape the universe in its own image.

Heart Engine. This huge, crystalline cluster of square valves and pixelated pipes continually pulses and moves, and radiates palpable heat and a red glow. Black metal pipes ranging in size from 2 feet to 5 feet across emerge from the Heart Engine to enter the Six-Face Throne and the walls all around it. The engine is encircled by what appears to be a ring of shining gray-black metal, which also pulses in time with the beating of the heart.



PIXELATED STEEL PREDATOR

The Heart Engine is the nexus of the pixelating curse. Any creature that touches it with its bare flesh suffers the pixelating curse at an accelerated rate thereafter. That creature rolls to avoid infection, goes up another physical level, and rolls to avoid increasing their mental level of the curse every minute.

If the Heart Engine is destroyed, the pixelating curse is immediately dispelled and all the other parts of the cube become nonfunctional. The Heart Engine has AC 18; 180 hit points; immunity to poison damage; immunity to bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. When damaged, it spills black pixelated blood, and all pixelated creatures and creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne that are on or in the cube understand that the Heart Engine is in danger.

Predatory Defender. The ring of shining gray-black metal is actually the foremost defender of the Heart Engine: a pixelated **steel predator**^M with these changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- It is immune to the frightened condition.

- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The pixelated steel predator's mission is to guard area 6.28. If any creature threatens or attacks the Heart Engine, the Six-Face Throne, or any of the other controls in this area, it uncurls its panther-like body from around the heart and attacks until it or its foes are destroyed. It will even attack the skull lord and other creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne if they attempt to damage it or the Heart Engine for some reason. The steel predator does not leave area 6.28 under any circumstances.

Going Down. Below and around the heart is a pit partially filled with the pipe-like 'guts' of the Archquadrone, and which slopes down into the slippery shape beneath it. A creature that enters this tight, red-lit space can crawl down into area 6.47, the exhaust shaft of the cube. However, this route is slippery with oil, and a creature must succeed on a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to hold on as they climb. On a failed check, the creature slides out of control down toward area 6.47, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw to grab onto the edge of the pit with their hands. On a failed save, the creature falls 300 feet down to the foul waters of area 1.1, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage.

The Six-Face Throne. Resembling six throne-like chairs in a hexagonal shape stacked back to back, these six linked seats sit at the center of what used to be the Archquadrone's skull. Sitting just above the chairs is a crown-like nest of pixelated pipes and wires. If any creature climbs the steps to the Six-Face Throne unaccompanied by the skull lord, the pixelated steel predator uncoils itself from the Heart Engine and attacks.

The Six-Face Throne has AC 18; 90 hit points; immunity to poison damage; bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage from nonmagical attacks not made with adamantite weapons; and resistance to cold and fire damage. Even if the throne is destroyed, creatures attuned to it remain so attuned as long as the Heart Engine survives, and can continue to control the cube. However, no new creatures can attune to the throne and gain control over the cube until the throne is rebuilt by the skull lord over a week's time.

Created by Vargo, the Six-Face Throne allows up to six creatures to take control of the cube systems once controlled by the dead Archquadrone. A number of pixelated suction cups hang down from the tangle above on heavy wires, each just the right size to be attached to a humanoid head.

If a creature presses the suction cup against its head, what happens next depends on its Intelligence. A creature with an Intelligence of 14 or higher automatically becomes attuned to the Six-Face Throne (see below), after which the suction cup detaches. A creature with an Intelligence of 10 to 13 is unable to interface with the throne, and instead takes 7 (2d6) psychic damage. A creature with an Intelligence of

9 or less literally hurts the throne with its stupidity, triggering an explosion that deals 21 (6d6) psychic damage and 21 (6d6) thunder damage to that creature and each other creature within a 30-foot radius. Any creature aside from the triggering creature can attempt a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw, reducing the damage by half on a success. Any pixelated creature that takes damage from this explosion are stunned for 1d3 rounds.

Attuning to the Six-Face Throne. A creature that becomes attuned to the Six-Face Throne gains access to various powers, which it understands instinctively:

- It can communicate by telepathy with other attuned creatures at any range.
- It can use the gravity controls (see below) while in area 6.28.
- It can use the scrying mosaics (see below) if it is anywhere within the cube.
- It can use the cannon controls (see below) while in area 6.28 if five or more faces of the cube have been activated.
- All pixelated creatures obey its commands, unless those orders contradict with the creatures' desire to protect the Six-Face Throne and the Heart Engine. If different attuned creatures give conflicting orders to a pixelated creature, that creature obeys whichever order is in the majority. If there is no majority, the pixelated creature takes no action, unable to decide.

It's impossible to become attuned more than once to the throne. If an attuned creature tries to do so again, it takes 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

Between the skull lord's two intelligent heads and Sladek the pixelated mage, there are three creatures attuned to the cube when the characters begin the adventure. If one or more characters attune themselves to the Six-Face Throne while Sladek and the skull lord are alive, the Heart Engine starts to beat stronger and faster, and the cube's powers increase. See the "Awakening the Cube" sidebar.

Gravity Controls. The glowing cube that levitates on the platform near the Six-Face Throne is covered with symbols. Pixelated lightning shoots back and forth between the bulbous machines, surrounding the floating cube with a halo of crackling red energy.

The gravity control cube can be touched and manipulated easily by any creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne. Any other creature that tries to touch it must make a DC 18 Strength saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 28 (8d6) lightning damage and is unable to touch the cube that round. On a success, the creature takes 14 (4d6) lightning damage but can touch the cube.

Each face of the control cube is numbered from 1 to 6, corresponding to one of the six faces of Cube 1717. The face of the cube that is up corresponds to the face that is up and above the water on the Material Plane. As an action, a creature can gently turn the control cube in midair so that a different face is up. This causes a great rumbling and hissing of steam in this area that lasts for 1 minute while the cube 'rolls' outside, but that movement goes unnoticed inside.

AWAKENING THE CUBE

Vargo's ultimate goal is to awaken the full functionality of Cube 1717. The cube's powers are dependent on the number of active faces of the Six-Face Throne. Each effect is cumulative if one or more faces are active.

No Faces Active. All the interior lights in the cube go out. The only places with light are the forges in areas 6.16 and 6.18, and wherever fitful fires burst forth from broken pipes from time to time. The cube stops producing its own internal gravity and the local gravity of each of the faces, so that all areas conform to the prevailing gravity of the world outside. The pixelating curse stops spreading, although all currently pixelated creatures and areas remain pixelated as long as the Heart Engine survives. The damaged soul tap (area 6.14) stops producing its endless flow of bodies. The cube sinks to the bottom of the Sea of Swords, and the forge fires eventually go out.

One Face. Lighting and local gravity functions in the cube. The soul tap produces bodies as noted in the adventure.

Two Faces. The cube gains partial vertical propulsive power, allowing it to rise to the surface of the water for up to 4 hours each day.

Three Faces. As at the start of the adventure, the cube has increased vertical propulsive power, allowing it to stay at the surface of the water. It can also sink underwater if the controllers of the Six-Face Throne want it to.

Four Faces. The cube gains the ability to move vertically up or down at a rate of 60 feet per round. If Vargo is in control of the cube, the skull lord causes it to rise out of the water, allowing the *handkerchief of darkness* to be grabbed and ending the fog. Freed from the Styx sea, all the faces of the cube rapidly pixelate.

Five Faces. The cube's main cannon (extending from area 6.28A to area 5.5) powers up. A creature that is attuned to and sitting in the Six-Face Throne can use the controls to fire the cannon as an action. Doing so has the effect of a *meteor swarm* spell that can be aimed at any points within 1 mile of the exterior of the cube. Additionally, all creatures and objects caught in the area of the cannon's four fiery orbs automatically contract the pixelating curse. Each time the cannon is fired, all creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne suffer one level of exhaustion.

Six Faces. The cube gains horizontal as well as vertical movement ability, flying at a rate of 60 feet per round. At this point, it is free to go anywhere in Faerûn.

The gravity control cube has AC 17; 30 hit points; and immunity to cold, fire, poison, lightning, and necrotic damage. If the control cube is destroyed, Cube 1717 stops producing its own internal gravity and the local gravity of each of the faces, so that all areas conform to the prevailing gravity of the world outside. The cube also stops moving and rolling, forcing creatures to exit it through the face that is currently above the water. A new control cube self-generates in one day.

Scrying Mosaics. Along each of the walls of this chamber at a height of 10 feet, as well as on the ceiling directly above the Six-Face Throne, a 20-foot-wide rectangular mosaic appears to show flat, square stones of gray, white, and black. Occasionally, the color of the stones changes, with white becoming black and vice versa in random patterns.

The five mosaics are magical, and serve as scrying mirrors. When a creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne is in this room, they can use a bonus action to cause the mosaics to display a pixelated image of the world outside the cube. The five mosaics show a color panoramic view of the exterior of the cube as seen from faces 2 to 5. Creatures and objects upon those faces appear as if they were semi-transparent, allowing an attuned creature to see creatures walking on the cube while also seeing through them to the landscape beyond. The only direction that cannot be seen is the bottom of the cube (face 1).

The scrying has no visible effect on the exterior of the cube, and creatures on faces 2 to 5 have no idea they are being scried on. The scrying effect ends when the creature that activated it leaves area 6.28. The scrying doesn't show any of the interior rooms or tunnels of the cube.

When a creature attuned to the Six-Face Throne is not in this area, it can use a bonus action to send its consciousness into the mosaic and see into the control room. The creature's head appears in color in one of the five mosaics, and it can see from that mosaic's perspective while not losing any awareness of its own surroundings. The creature can also hear whatever is happening in the room, and can speak to creatures in the room in a supernaturally loud, booming voice. If multiple creatures attuned to the Six-Face Throne attempt this at the same time, their heads appear in separate mosaics.

Cannon Controls. This elaborate apparatus of buttons, switches and levers can be reached from one of the six chairs of the Six-Face Throne. Pipes run into the wall from the apparatus, pushing past other pipes and pistons before reaching area 6.28A. Metal tubes from the Heart Engine also converge on the opening. A successful DC 20 Intelligence (Arcana or History) check identifies the cannon controls as belonging to some kind of magical siege engine.

The entrance leading to area 6.28A initially appears to be jammed shut with pixelated pipes and cables. A Small creature can sneak through to area 6.28A with a successful DC 25 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

The cannon is nonfunctional until five faces of the Six-Face Throne are activated (see the "Awakening the Cube" sidebar).

AREA 6.28A. CANNON SHAFT

This round, pixelated metal shaft leads some 250 feet toward face 5, gradually widening from 2 feet in diameter to 20 feet at area 5.5. The walls of the shaft are warm and hum with energy. Tiny maintenance shafts, grates, and pipes along the way vent heat and occasional harmless electrical discharges.

As it reaches area 5.5, the shaft ends at an interior door (see that area's description). Anyone approaching the door from area 6.28 becomes aware of an increasing stench of decay and rotten meat.

If the cannon is fired, the interior and exterior doors at area 5.5 open and a violet light begins to build in intensity at the bottom of the shaft. Any creatures in area 6.28A or area 5.5 are killed the next round as

the cannon shaft is flooded with enough energy to destroy a castle.

AREA 6.29: LIBRARY

This room of black onyx pillars and arches is not pixelated, thanks to a constant spray of Styx water (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar).

The library is lined with stone shelves, making it one of the few rooms in the cube not entirely made of metal. Glowing wall panels provide dim light, and three *driftglobes* provide additional illumination as they float through the stacks. Several stone tables and chairs provide places to sit and read.

The shelves are covered with books and scrolls—many suffering damage from the dripping mist. The majority of the scrolls are in Infernal, with others in Common, Dwarvish, or rare and forgotten languages of the Material Plane. Most of the books are of six types:

- Histories of the great military battles of forgotten empires
- Descriptions of armor and weapons
- Lists of names of the dead
- Tedious legal texts describing the many laws of Acheron and the gruesome punishments for breaking them
- Transcribed court proceedings from legal cases in Acheron, including the gruesome punishments decreed by infernal judges
- Hymns to Bane, god of tyrants

Several stacks of books have been pulled from the shelves by the skull lord, and now rest in puddles on the tables. Among them are four reference books on multiple-headed creatures, from the hydra to the chimera to the ettin. There are also eight tomes on mechanical and electrical engineering, two books discussing the River Styx and its effects, five books on brain surgery, and four books on the history of Faerûn's Sword Coast. These last titles were written centuries ago and are completely outdated.

One cabinet between the main doors contains ink, quill pens, blank paper, and writing implements, and has two shelves stacked with games. A character who searches the game shelf finds dice, several damp decks of cards (including Three Dragon Ante), a fine chess set (120 gp), a fine backgammon set (180 gp), a checkers-like game played with small opals (worth 1,000 gp), and several more-obscure games. The skull lord might use games to test the intelligence of the characters (see "The Skull Lord's Plan").

Any character who can read Infernal and who spends 1 hour searching the library for interesting books discovers four *spell scrolls* tucked away in the stacks—*creation*, *detect thoughts*, *fly*, and *Otiluke's resilient sphere*.

If a character specifically searches the library for secret doors, a successful DC 25 Wisdom (Perception) check discovers a sliding bookshelf that leads to area 6.30.

AREA 6.30: SECRET LIBRARY

This dimly lit room contains the library's most precious books. All have been pixelated, as even the skull lord

isn't aware of this place. (Avnas is now the only person who knows about it.)

While the characters initially explore this room, they begin to hear strange whispers coming from all around them. If they do not leave immediately, 1d4 + 1 **allips** emerge from the walls and attack, formed out of the evil lore of this vile place. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the allip.)

If the books in this area are viewed unpixelated, most are revealed as bizarre poetry, secret plans for military battles in Acheron, or fiendish spellbooks. (You can determine the contents of these books if any wizard characters are interested in them.) An especially large stack of books offers up all the gory details of the tortures inflicted on prisoners of war and disobedient soldiers in the laboratory at area 6.23 and the torture chamber at area 6.43.

Two particularly old and heavy books are set on two pedestals at the center of the room. One is a *tome of clear thought*. The other is the *book of patterns* (see the "New Magic Items" appendix).

AREA 6.31: VARGO'S CHAMBER

If it has not been encountered already, Vargo the **skull lord**^M is 50 percent likely to be in this room when the characters enter. Vargo is always accompanied by its bodyguards—a pixelated **merregon**^M and a pixelated **shadar-kai shadow dancer**^M—that defend their lord to the death. But the skull lord's shadar-kai servant is someone the characters might be looking for (see "The Missing Shadar-kai," below).

The steel door to this room is unpixelated, and is inscribed with a carving of three skulls. The door opens only to a key the skull lord wears around its neck, but it can be picked with a successful DC 30 Dexterity check using thieves' tools, or it can be broken down. The door has AC 18, 30 hit points, a damage threshold of 5, immunity to psychic and poison damage, and resistance to cold and fire damage.

Beyond the door is a sumptuous room which is not pixelated, thanks to a constant spray of Styx water (see the "Styx Mist" sidebar). This area is noticeably colder than the corridor outside. The room is lit by a combination of ghostly glowing worms that crawl out of the furniture, a dusty candelabra with candles made of eyeballs glued together, and red glowing panels in the walls.

The walls here are lined with black curtains. In the center of the room is a large black steel sarcophagus lined with red velvet. The rest of the room is divided into three parts, each featuring the same furniture: plush high-backed chairs, kingly tables, and fine cabinets and wardrobes. However, all these fine furnishings have been so damaged by the damp as to be worthless.

The three tables are each set with three silver cups (a total of nine cups, 75 gp each). Each of the three sections of the room also has a wine rack loaded with twenty bottles of rich wine (sixty bottles, 90 gp each). In a wineskin hidden among one of the sets of bottles is six doses of torpor poison (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*). It can be found with a successful DC

15 Wisdom (Perception) check, or by any character who takes all the bottles.

At the bottom of the sarcophagus, visible to any character who searches the steel coffin, is a musty *spell scroll of dimension door*.

One of the three sections of the room contains a glass case with the partially pixelated rotting head of a hideous devilish creature—the dead Earl Andromalius.

Best Two out of Three. When the characters first enter Cube 1717, only two of Vargo's three heads are fully active and aware. The third head babbles and chatters idiotically, when not sucking from a straw attached to a flask tied around its neck. Each of the skull lords' other two heads has a key tied around its neck—to the treasury (area 6.26) and this area. The flask the third head drinks from is filled with Styx water, keeping the skull lord safe from the pixelating curse.

Vargo was once three evil adventurers who teamed up to defeat the devil Earl Andromalius. When they were defeated, Andromalius subjected them to a horrific curse, combining the three of them into a single undead being. At first, the three heads hated being bound together, but over hundreds of years in Andromalius's prison, they gradually developed something like a group mind. When the cube was overtaken by the pixelating curse, Vargo managed to remain uninfected and gain its freedom.

Vargo's unique ability to deal with the curse stems from the skull lord's unique makeup. The Styx water absorbed by Vargo's undead body is strong enough to protect the skull lord from pixelating, but only the head that actually drinks the water is subject to its mental effects. With two heads still functioning, Vargo has survived the chaos with its wits intact, and was able to develop the Six-Face Throne as a way to control creatures pixelated by the curse. Vargo's two conscious heads became the Throne's two initial controllers. Sladek the pixelated mage became the third.

Fighting the Skull Lord. With only two heads active, Vargo is slightly weaker than normal. It has the statistics of a **skull lord**^M with these changes:

- It cannot cast 7th-level spells.
- It has only two legendary actions.

Vargo has also claimed the *Ioun stones* once owned by the wizard Sladek, which grant it additional features:

- It cannot be surprised.
- Its Intelligence is 18.
- Its Wisdom is 17.
- Its proficiency bonus is increased by 1.
- It has a +1 bonus to AC.
- It can cast *fear* once without expending a spell slot.

See "Ioun Stones" earlier in the adventure and chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information on Vargo's *Ioun stones*.

Vargo is a cunning, charismatic opponent who commands the absolute obedience of all the pixelated creatures on the cube. If the characters attack the skull lord, it musters all available pixelated creatures to its defense. But if possible, it tries to parley with the characters in the hope of them letting down their

guard. The skull lord tries to gauge the intelligence of each of the characters, and keeps a special eye out for wizards. See “The Skull Lord’s Plan” earlier in the adventure for more information about Vargo’s tactics and endgame.

The Missing Shadar-kai. Though Astilbe in her pixelated form looks very much like any of the other humanoid pixelated guards, characters can note her shadowy coloration and the spiked chain she wields in combat. If Fern is present, she recognizes her friend at once, calling out and pleading with her to surrender. This takes Astilbe out of the fight. If Astilbe is unpixelated at any point, she regains her original alignment and statistics, and both she and Fern fight alongside the characters.

As a pixelated **shadar-kai shadow dancer**^M, Astilbe has the following changes:

- Her alignment is lawful neutral.
- She has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures.
- She is immune to the frightened condition.
- She has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

AREA 6.32: BROKEN AREA

As the characters approach this area, they hear a scream that rises and quickly falls. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds. When the characters can see into this area, they observe that every six seconds, a naked humanoid appears from above them and plummets down into the darkness below. See area 6.14 for more information.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. The walls, ceiling and floor are smashed open here, forming a great tear through which pixelated pipes and gigantic steel girders are visible.

Unpixelated. The shattered girders, pipes, and floor reveal the deadly sharpness of their edges.

Climbing the Girders. Navigating the mangled girders and pipes is difficult and dangerous. Climbing the 200 feet between this area and area 6.14 or area 6.39 requires four successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) checks (one for each 50 feet climbed). On a failed check, a character slips and falls, plummeting to area 6.39 and taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage for each 10 feet fallen (maximum 20d6). A character who sees the area as pixelated has disadvantage on the check.

NEARING THE END

The lowest level beneath face 6 is darker and dingier than the two levels above. The rumbling of the cube’s engines is loud in all areas here, and the pixelated walls are marred by rust-colored stains.

The temples and side rooms on this level are filthy with cubic debris—ash, broken metal, mud and dirt—and the decomposing pixelated bodies of soldiers. Only the wide main hallway that runs around the outside of the lower level is relatively clear of bodies and rubble, as it is swept clean by the hellfire engine (see area 6.41).

With each successful check, a character still takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage from the jagged metal along the descent path.

AREA 6.33: EMPTY GUARDROOMS

These rooms are identical to area 6.8, but no guards are present here unless you wish to increase the ranks of the skull lord’s followers.

AREA 6.33A. GRAVITY JUNCTION/ GUARDROOM

This room is identical to area 6.8, except it features no guards and has two passages that lead to interior doors, then to area 4.2 and area 5.3 beyond.

AREA 6.34: DAMAGED CORRIDOR

A great explosion has collapsed this corridor, melting and breaking its steel walls and the girders behind them. The walls are blackened and discolored. Everything is pixelated, and great heaps of metal cubes fill the collapsed area.

Like a living body, the cube is slowly regenerating this area. If the characters rest here or try to remove the rubble, they see that the rubble is gradually clearing itself, oozing back into the walls in great cubical clots. It takes three days from when the characters first enter the cube for a corridor to completely repair itself.

In places, the pixelated pipes and tubes behind the walls are exposed and smashed to reveal a black pixelated liquid dripping out—something uncomfortably similar to both oil and blood. Any character who presses their ear to the wall can hear the engines in the cube pulsing in a steady rhythm—matching the beating of the Archquadrone’s heart.

AREA 6.35: STYX PUDDLES

The rigid right angles and cubic forms of this level are interrupted in areas where the metal walls are bent and broken. In the center of each of these twisted areas is a pool of murky black Styx water, 1 to 3 feet deep. When the cube first fell to the Material Plane, numerous sections were still flooded with Styx water. As the cube regenerated, most of that water was pumped out through area 6.47, but these last few pools remain.

Pixelated creatures do not pursue characters into the pools. A character who wades through the Styx water feels a chill as their memories begin to fade, but is at no risk of suffering the water’s mental effects. A creature immersed in the water must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw or lose their memories (see “The Styx Sea”). Creatures suffering the pixelating curse aren’t cured by exposure to the water unless they fully immerse themselves.

AREA 6.36: ANTECHAMBER OF THE GREAT TEMPLE OF TIAMAT.

This area is dark, except for a red flickering light shining from area 6.38. The features of the area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This tall-ceilinged room is decorated with huge pixelated relief carvings in red and black stone, showing creatures with wings. Eight oubliettes around

the room consist of 10-foot-deep pits covered with square steel grates, and are heavy with the scent of rot. Two tall, pixelated archways lead out of the room.

Unpixelated. The reliefs can be identified as black and red dragons, carved in red marble and basalt. The bases of all the statues are engraved in Draconic with hymns to Tiamat.

Place of Sacrifice. When the cube was a functional fortress, the eight oubliettes were used to store sacrifices and food for the abishai priests of Tiamat who controlled this temple. The sacrifice pits contain sand and bits of humanoid remains.

When the pixelating curse overcame the fortress, the temple of Tiamat remained untainted through the power of the dragon queen. This antechamber was too far from the center of that power to have been affected, but midway along the corridor to area 6.38, the walls and floor unpixelate, gradually changing from a blocky mosaic to natural black granite.

AREA 6.37: PRIESTS' BARRACKS

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. A central corridor opens up between numerous black metal doors set with small, square-barred windows. Most windows reveal small rooms beyond that contain a number of indistinct, blocky objects, but a few rooms are empty and finished in white tile. Several blocky machines stand in the main area, which is lit by white glowing bricks in the walls. A number of crudely humanoid, cubic bodies of black and gray are spread across the floor with mosaic-like black stains spilling out around them. The area smells of rot.

Unpixelated. These were meditation chambers and personal quarters for priests of Bane and Loviatar. Each individual room contains a low table, a simple toilet and sink, and personal items such as priestly robes, maces, and holy symbols. The white-tiled chamber is a slime shower and the machines are food devices, all similar to those seen in area 6.11. The doors to individual rooms have no locks.

The rotting remains of the dead priests, killed in the assault on the cube, lie on the floor in pools of dried blood.

AREA 6.38: GREAT TEMPLE OF TIAMAT

This chamber was the temple of Tiamat, one of the gods worshiped by the soldiers and lords of the cube. Thanks to the power of the holy idol here, the temple was able to resist the pixelating curse that has swallowed all other areas of the cube.

Entering this area reveals a vault-like chamber walled in black granite, whose ceiling rises out of sight 100 feet overhead. Human skulls glowing with the light of *continual flame* spells are set on pedestals across the room and hang from the walls to fill the area with bright light.

In the center of the room stands a great brass pool filled with burning oil. At the far end of the chamber is a large bloodstained obsidian statue of Tiamat—a



BLACK ABISHAI

monstrous dragon with five heads whose eyes are glittering gems. A number of items are set at the base of the statue, along with piles of glittering coins. A smell of burned meat and incense fills the air.

Abishai Assault. The temple's most powerful priests survived the assault on the cube: seven **white abishai**^M and one **black abishai**^M. Not allied in any way with the skull lord, these infernal dragons have been seeking a way to escape the cube since the assault, along with sacrifices to Tiamat for protecting them from the pixelating curse. When not scouting the cube for these things, they rest here.

If the characters entered area 6.36 with any light or noise, the abishai flew up to cling to the ceiling. When they party enters this area, they attack with surprise.

Relics and Retribution. In their explorations of the cube, the abishai have gathered treasure and left it as offerings at the foot of the idol: 2,250 gp, 752 sp, and a *tentacle rod* left behind by a fallen drow.

The idol of Tiamat radiates powerful magic and evil. If the abishai kill a creature, they drain its blood onto the idol while singing hymns to Tiamat, then consume the sacrifice. The idol's gem eyes are worth 2,000 gp each (for a total of 20,000 gp). However, any attempt to remove the eyes or otherwise damage the statue causes an **eidolon** (in the form of a howling, ghostly abishai) to rise from the fiery pool. The eidolon enters the **sacred statue** of Tiamat, which animates to attack all non-devils in the temple. See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for more information on the eidolon and the sacred statue.

If the sacred statue is destroyed, the fire in the brass pool goes out and the room's protective aura is

dispelled. This causes the pixelating curse to reshape the temple in 1 hour.

A Refreshing Dip. While it burns, the fiery pool of oil radiates transmutation magic and evil, but it channels the same power that prevents the pixelating curse from transforming the temple. The abishai regularly bathe in the oil, which cures them of the pixelating curse if they contracted it elsewhere on the cube. Any creature can submerge itself in the burning oil, which drains 1 physical level and 1 mental level of the pixelating curse at the end of each of the creature's turns. The curse is removed when the creature reaches physical level 0. However, any non-abishai that enters the pool takes 14 (4d6) fire damage at the start of each of its turns.

AREA 6.39: BOTTOM OF THE RIFT

As the characters approach this room, they hear a scream that gets suddenly louder, then ends in a bone-crushing thump. If they wait in the hall, the pattern of sound repeats every six seconds. See area 6.14 for more information.

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Some massive force has torn open the roof of this chamber, revealing huge pixelated steel girders and pipes, and creating a great hole that opens up to darkness overhead. In the center of this area, below the hole, a pile of unpixelated bodies rises twenty feet high.

Unpixelated. The shattered girders and pipes reveal the deadly sharpness of their edges.

Death From Above. Adults of every race and gender are represented among the dead. Most are human, but gnomes, dwarves, and other creatures can also be seen. All are naked, and appear to have died from the fall. Every six seconds, a screaming humanoid falls from the darkness and smashes into the top of the pile of bodies, where it dies of massive trauma. Characters who attempt to climb to the top of the pile are at risk of being struck by a falling body, and must succeed on a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw each round or take 17 (5d6) bludgeoning damage.

Bodies that fall here become infected by the pixelating curse, and characters who inspect the pile see that the bodies at the bottom (those that have been here the longest) are beginning to turn cubic. However, the bodies are regularly cleaned up by the hellfire engine that patrols this area (see area 6.41). If the hellfire engine is destroyed, the bodies rapidly begin to pile up, pixelate, and spread out at a rate of six hundred bodies per hour. Within four hours, this area becomes impassable. Over a longer period, the entire lower level—and eventually the entire cube—will be filled.

Interrupted Fall. The characters might attempt to rescue one or more of the falling individuals, using spells such as *feather fall* or *telekinesis*. If they are successful, see area 6.14 for more information.

AREA 6.40: WIRING SHAFTS

Much smaller than normal corridors, these narrow spaces are filled with wires and pipes that occasionally emit heat and steam. A Small creature can squeeze into a wiring shaft with a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, which must be made at each new area or junction. With a failed check, the character can peek into the area beyond but not enter it.

These access spaces for the cube's machinery were once used by duergar and gnome technicians. A creative character might attempt to damage the cube by unleashing powerful spells or attacks here. Anything less than a 9th-level spell is unlikely to seriously harm the cube, but might cause a distraction that the pixelated guards will investigate.

AREA 6.41: PUMP ROOM

Pixelated or unpixelated, the appearance of this room is much the same: a great factory-like space filled with pumps, valves, and pipes. Most of the pipes lead into area 6.47, where they force water and debris into the exhaust shaft to be expelled.

Cleaning Crew. This room is dominated by a massive, boxy metal device with terrifying bestial mouths carved into it—a pixelated **hellfire engine**^M modified by Avnas for cleaning duty. This gigantic construct regularly clears out the lower levels, rolling down the



PIXELATED
HELLFIRE ENGINE

main corridor to suck up bodies, debris, and small amounts of Styx water before returning here to shoot them through pipes into area 6.47. It has the statistics of a hellfire engine (including all of its attacks) with the following changes:

- Its alignment is lawful neutral.
- It has telepathy out to a range of 120 feet, but can use it to communicate only with other pixelated creatures. Being unintelligent, it can communicate only emotions and vague feelings.
- It has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide while in a pixelated area.

The hellfire engine recognizes devils and servants of the skull lord, and attacks all other creatures on sight. Because of its size, the hellfire engine cannot leave the wide main corridor that runs around the lower level. However, it can attack creatures in nearby areas using its ranged weapons, liquefying foes with its Bonemelt Sprayer and sucking up any remains that flow into the main hall. If the construct sees an enemy go into a room it can't reach, it waits for them to come out as long as it can see them. If a creature goes out of its range and out of vision, the hellfire engine waits for 10 minutes, then goes back to its rounds.

AREA 6.42: DEATH TRAP

This area is an empty guardroom, similar to area 6.8 and the area 6.33 rooms on this level. It has an interior door leading to area 5.1, and a faint mosaic stain of small pink, white, and red cubes the spread across the walls and floor. The stain appears to have been scrubbed or wiped away in the center of the room, but nonetheless marks a distinct path between area 5.1 and area 6.43. A smell of rotten meat can also be sensed in the direction of area 6.43.

Creatures that slip and fall as a result of the gravity switch in area 5.2 drop nearly 600 feet and land here, taking 20d6 bludgeoning damage. The pixelated adult oblex of area 5.1 spends some of its time here eating fallen bodies, but the hellfire engine (area 6.41) cleans up most of the mess. With a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Survival) check, a character confirms that the trail has been left by a slimy creature moving back and forth through this area.

AREA 6.43: TORTURE CHAMBER/OBLEX ROOM

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. Strange objects made of thick gray, black, and brown blocks fill this room. Some resemble tables, but their surfaces are irregular. Others look like upright cases or trunks big enough to walk into, while still others resemble siege equipment or oversized birdcages. Strange square mosaics mark the walls, and the floor is covered with irregular encrustations of black cubes, like a crystalline growth marked by occasional dark-green stains.

Unpixelated. The unknown objects within the room are all torture equipment—cruel devices beyond mortal imagination. The markings on the walls are symbols of Loviatar, goddess of pain.

The dark encrustation is a squishy slime excreted by the oblex spawn that feed in this area. Indigestible fragments are scattered within it, including bits of armor and chunks of yellow bone. The darker masses among the slime are eight pixelated **oblex spawn**^M, which wait for prey to enter the room before swarming from all directions.

If injured, the **adult oblex**^M at area 5.1 retreats to this room, where its spawn reinforce it.

AREA 6.44: TEMPLE OF LOVIATAR

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. The floor of this high-ceilinged chamber is lined with rows of what appear to be flat, square scales of glittering glass. At one end of the chamber stands a blocky pedestal, from which a black and white pixelated humanoid statue has fallen. Several faceless, blocky bodies lie on the floor, and the stench of rot hangs in the air.

Unpixelated. The statue depicts a woman with a beautiful and cruel face holding a whip—Loviatar, goddess of pain and consort of Bane. The scales on the floor are trenches filled with broken glass, which is deadly sharp and merely appears flat due to the pixelating curse. A creature that steps on the broken glass in bare feet or soft shoes takes 2 (1d4) piercing damage per 5 feet traveled.

The temple has been desecrated by the worshipers of the Archquadrone. The bodies of Loviatar's priests lie on the floor. All carry whips, daggers, and holy symbols, but nothing of value.

AREA 6.45: BERBALANG'S ROOM

This area is identical to the priests' barracks at area 6.37, except that one room here is used as a lair by Bunch, the skull lord's **berbalang**^M ally. If the characters have not already met and destroyed Bunch, the **berbalang** is here counting its bones.

The **berbalang**'s lair is filled with pixelated yellowish-gray skulls and bones to a depth of 4 feet, with duergar, gnome, and human remains the most common. Bunch obsessively sorts through its collection for hours on end, using *Speak with Dead* to mine the memories the skulls contain, then scribing those tales on the other bones. Bunch is protective of these treasures, and the **berbalang** runs to alert the skull lord if the characters mess with its collection.

Any character who searches the bones and succeeds on a DC 20 Wisdom (Perception) check finds a *ring of free action* within the pile.

AREA 6.46: TEMPLE OF LADUGUER

The features of this area appear different depending on whether the characters have an unpixelated view.

Pixelated. This wide chamber features a ceiling that is lower than the corridor outside. The floor is covered with rows of trenches, which surround a central heap of gray and black metallic cubes. Here and there, the trenches are darkly stained, and all around the room lie short, blocky figures from which the stench of rot rises.

Unpixelated. Duergar dead are scattered throughout what was once a temple to the duergar deity Laduguer,

Master of Crafts. The central heap is Laduguer's iron idol, which has been completely smashed. Only a close inspection identifies a few limbs and the crushed remains of the statue's beard.

AREA 6.47: EXHAUST SHAFT

This roughly pixelated circular shaft rises nearly 200 feet from the oily pool at area 1.1 to the Heart Engine at area 6.28 far above. The temperature is warm here, and gets hotter as the shaft rises toward area 6.28. The shaft is dimly lit by red lights seen high above.

Characters who enter the cube from area 1.1 can climb or fly to the Heart Engine (although thick pipes block the engine from view until they reach it). The walls are slick with warm slime pouring down from a multitude of exhaust pipes and grates, making climbing difficult, but the cubic surfaces of the pixelated walls counteract this somewhat.

Going Up. Climbing the 300 feet between this area and area 6.28 requires six successful DC 20 Strength (Athletics) checks. On a failed check, a creature falls and takes damage as normal.

A character who enters the bottom of the shaft and succeeds on a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check notices a number of dry pipes that are just barely large enough for a Small creature to crawl into. With a successful DC 20 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, a Small character can enter the wiring shafts (area 6.40).

The exhaust shaft periodically rumbles as black cubical slime and pixelated bodies pour out of its side pipes, then explode out through the pool at area 1.1 in a geyser of pressure and heat. If any character rolls a 1 on the Strength check to climb, the exhaust shaft begins to rumble and shake as the pressure builds. Two rounds later, the pressure wave hits, dealing 21 (6d6) fire damage and 21 (6d6) bludgeoning damage to every creature in the shaft or in area 6.47. Each of those creatures must then succeed on a DC 18 Strength saving throw or be flung out of the shaft onto face 1.

The proximity to the Heart Engine makes the pixelating curse stronger within the shaft than outside it. While in the shaft, creatures must make all checks and saving throws related to the curse every 10 minutes, rather than at the end of each short rest. A creature that reaches physical level 2 while climbing the shaft has disadvantage on Strength checks as a result of the sudden transformation of its hands into rough, cubical mittens.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

Depending on their interactions with Vargo and their ultimate choice about what to do about the threat represented by Cube 1717, the characters might bring the adventure to a number of different conclusions.

VARGO AWAKENS THE CUBE

If Vargo manages to attune to all six parts of the Six-Face Throne, the skull lord reveals its new goal: the conquest of the Sword Coast. The cube is flown to the nearest city, where Vargo demands that the inhabitants surrender to its will—then blasts them with the cube cannon until they submit.

Any injured survivors of the cube cannon quickly pixelate, becoming additional soldiers under Vargo's control. Gradually, the skull lord's pixelated army grows, and the very landscape of the realm is transformed. Some lands resist Vargo, while others send offerings of gold, jewels, and magic items to be spared from the skull lord's destructive wrath and the pixel plague. The Sword Coast descends into darkness and terror.

PIXELS TRIUMPHANT


If Vargo is killed but another pixelated creature (including Sladek) remains alive and attuned to the Six-Face Throne, all the pixelated creatures of the cube telepathically confer among themselves. In truth, they never fully trusted Vargo because of the skull lord's unpixelated state. So with that undead master gone, its former followers can carry out their own plan: peacefully turning the entire world into pixels and spreading the glorious gift of the Archquadrone.

All pixelated creatures on the cube immediately converge on the Six-Face Throne, ready to attune to it or die trying. If enough of them are successful, the cube awakens and they send it flying away from the Styx sea. The cube lands in different spots on Faerûn, dropping off small groups of pixelated creatures to infect the land, the local vegetation, and all nearby creatures.

DESTRUCTION OF THE HEART ENGINE

The only way to truly stop the pixelating curse is to destroy the Heart Engine. When the Heart Engine reaches 0 hit points (or if it is completely immersed in the Styx sea), it explodes. A wave of energy sweeps out from it, unpixelating everything in and on the cube. Any surviving pixelated creatures come back to their senses.

With the Heart Engine gone, the Six-Face Throne stops functioning as well. The entire interior of the cube goes dark as its power fails and it sinks into the depths of the sea, never to rise again. If the characters are in the cube when this happens, you can decide how fast the cube sinks—and how perilous a time they have getting out before it's completely submerged and flooded.

After the characters return to port, word of their exploits will quickly spread, and the dark tale will be told of what the pixelating curse might have done had it been allowed to run unchecked. If the adventurers don't already have a reputation as legendary heroes, they soon will, as all the folk of the Sword Coast learn of how the characters saved the world from a terrible fate. 

Design and Cartography: Jason Bradley Thompson
Editing, Development, and Layout for *Dragon+*:
Scott Fitzgerald Gray

A full-size map of Face 6 is [available for download](#).

APPENDIX: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

The following new magic items appear in this adventure.

AMULET OF THE STYX

Wondrous item, rare

This amulet of smoked glass on a platinum chain contains a small amount of Styx water, making it resemble a round black gem unless closely inspected. While wearing the amulet, you are immune to the pixelating curse.

In addition, when you sleep or trance, you dream the lost memories of a random creature that has died, giving you some of that creature's skills and insights. At the end of a long rest taken while you wear the *amulet of the Styx*, you gain proficiency in one skill or with one tool of your choice. You cannot already have proficiency with the skill or tool kit. You lose this temporary proficiency at the end of your next long rest.

BOOK OF PATTERNS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This ancient book appears to be a fine spellbook bound in the skin of some extradimensional creature. But the book contains no text, instead being filled with strange patterns. Some are curves; some are cubes; others are spiraling designs, or stars, or leaves and plant life; or patterns like hair and veins and flesh. Many of the patterns contain optical illusions, and seem to move disturbingly when seen from the corner of a viewer's eye.

A creature that merely looks at this book for the first time must succeed on a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw or become charmed by the book. While charmed in this way, the creature is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. Unless it takes damage or is shaken out of its torpor by another creature as an action, the charmed creature remains staring at the book indefinitely, suffering one level of exhaustion every 4 hours until dead. A creature that succeeds on the save or has the charm broken can read the book safely.

Studying the book requires 48 hours of effort over a period of 7 or fewer days. At the end of this study, you must make a DC 17 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, you gain a form of indefinite madness (see chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*) but can attempt to study the book again. With a successful save, you gain the ability to use charges from the book to cast spells as long as the book is in your possession.

The book has 8 charges. As an action, you can expend 1 or more charges to cast one of the following spells from it (save DC 17): *creation* (5 charges), *hypnotic pattern* (3 charges), *illusory script* (1 charge), *phantasmal force* (2 charges), or *phantasmal killer* (4 charges). The book regains 1d4 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn.

As long as you possess the book, your sleep is filled with dreams of its strange patterns. This might grant

you knowledge of unique rituals or magical effects, as determined by the DM.

CENSER OF BLOOD

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This brass incense burner hangs on a brass chain, and is covered with fiendish symbols and the names of ancient vampires. While the censer is on your person, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to track by scent and Wisdom (Perception) checks to detect smells. In addition, you are aware of the exact location of any creature within 60 feet of you that is below its hit point maximum.

As an action, you can spill one drop or more of your own blood into the censer, causing it to steam. You suffer one level of exhaustion, and the censer issues forth 1d6 vampiric mists that appear within 10 feet of you. (See *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes* for information on the vampiric mist.) You can repeat this process to create multiple mists, taking yourself to a maximum of five levels of exhaustion. The vampiric mists don't appear if you are in sunlight.

The summoned vampiric mists understand your language and obey your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, they attack all nearby humanoids except yourself, only sparing those that you specifically command them to.

You reduce levels of exhaustion imposed by the *censer of blood* in the normal fashion. Each mist lasts until it is destroyed, until you die, or until you dismiss it as a bonus action.

HANDKERCHIEF OF DARKNESS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This black velvet handkerchief is inscribed with a repeating pattern of closed eyes. The handkerchief normally appears to be the size of a napkin, but it can be unfolded to the size of a tablecloth.

When the handkerchief is folded to the size of a napkin, you can drop or throw it as an action, creating an area of magical darkness around the handkerchief identical to that created by a *darkness* spell. The darkness endures until the handkerchief is picked up by a creature.

When the handkerchief is unfolded to the size of a tablecloth, you can throw it as an action to have it magically fly high in the air. The handkerchief hovers 50 feet above you and a shadowy fog billows out of it, filling a cylinder 100 feet high and 1,000 feet across, with the handkerchief at its center. The area of the fog is lightly obscured, and creatures that suffer negative effects while in sunlight ignore those effects while within the fog. The fog lasts until the handkerchief is picked up by a creature (typically one that can fly).

MERRENOLOTH'S OAR

Weapon, very rare (requires attunement)

Made of special wood that grows only in the Lower Planes, this long oar is carved with ancient symbols of death from countless cultures.

While you hold the oar, you have advantage on Dexterity checks to maintain your balance while on

a watercraft. In addition, as a bonus action while you hold the oar, you can learn the depth of any water or liquid within sight, and the distance and direction to the closest land while you are on open water.

The *merrenoloth's oar* can be used as a weapon. It is treated as a *+1 lance* when so wielded, and it can be used one-handed while you are on board any watercraft.

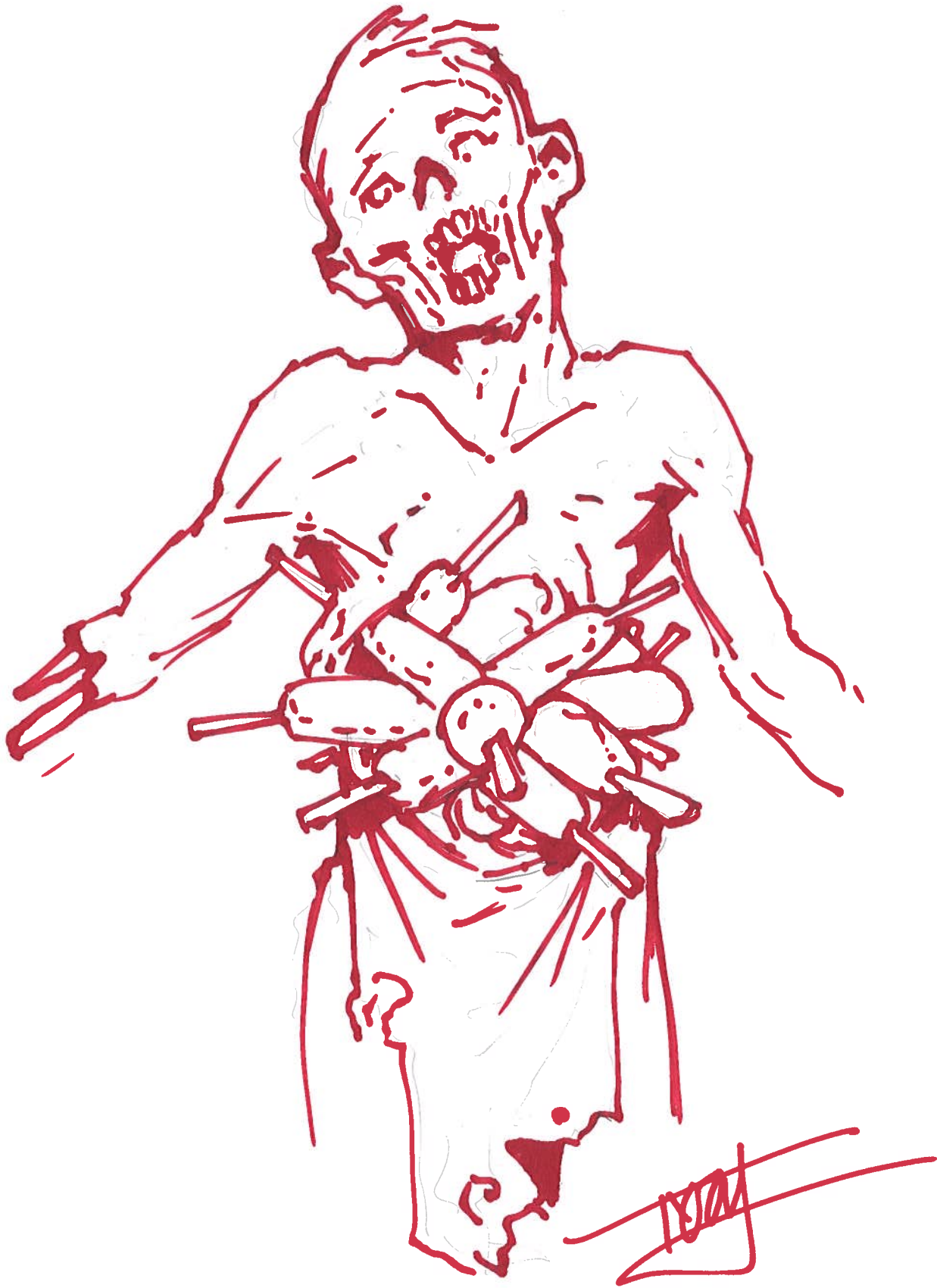
PIXEL GLASSES

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

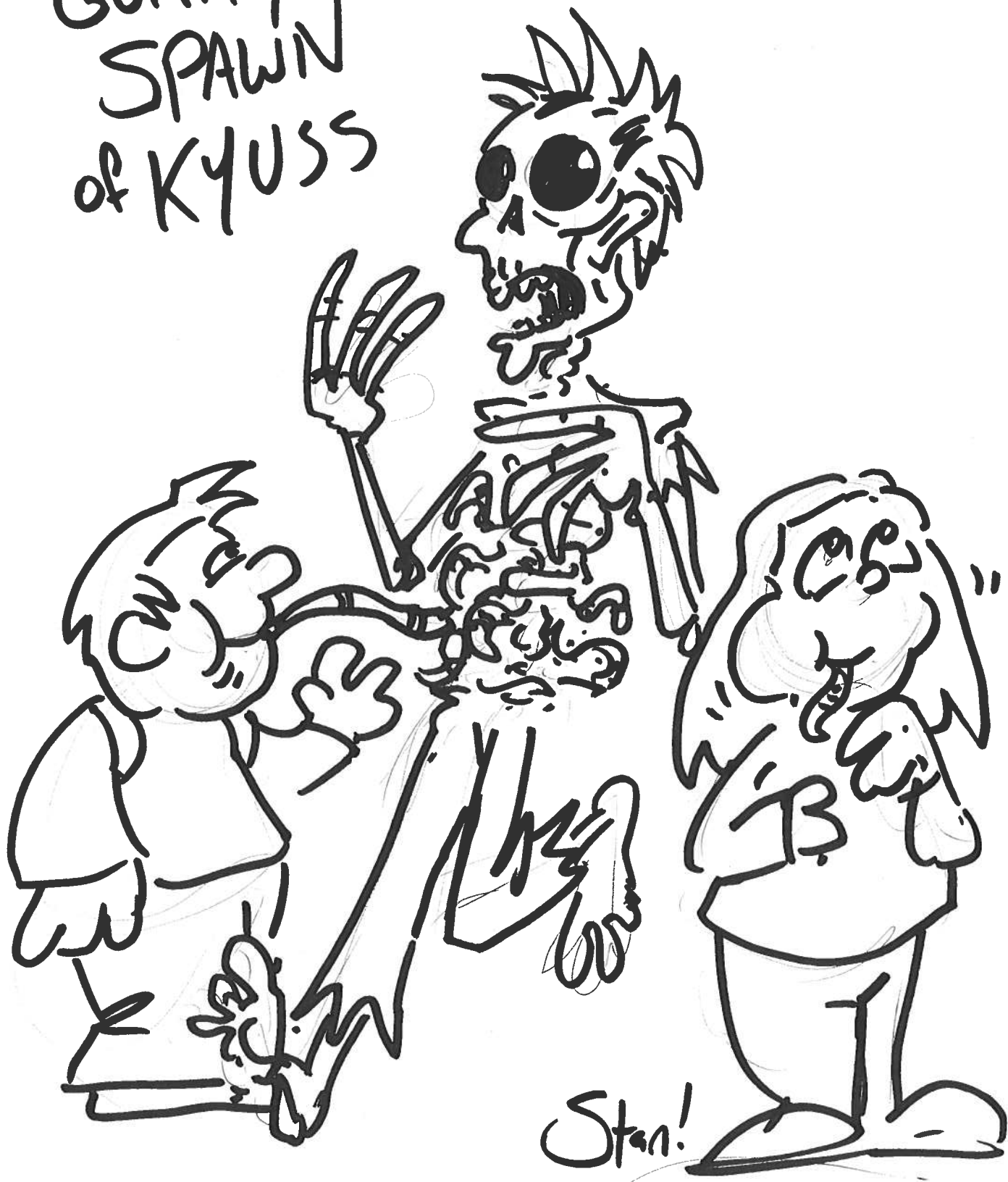
These unique magic items were created by the derro architect Avnas for use aboard the pixelated Cube 1717. However, their potential benefit to the characters is balanced by a dangerous curse.

The square lenses of the *pixel glasses* are cut of thick, dark glass. While wearing the glasses, you see pixelated objects and creatures as if they were normal, the same way that pixelated creatures do. However, normal creatures and objects look hideously distorted.

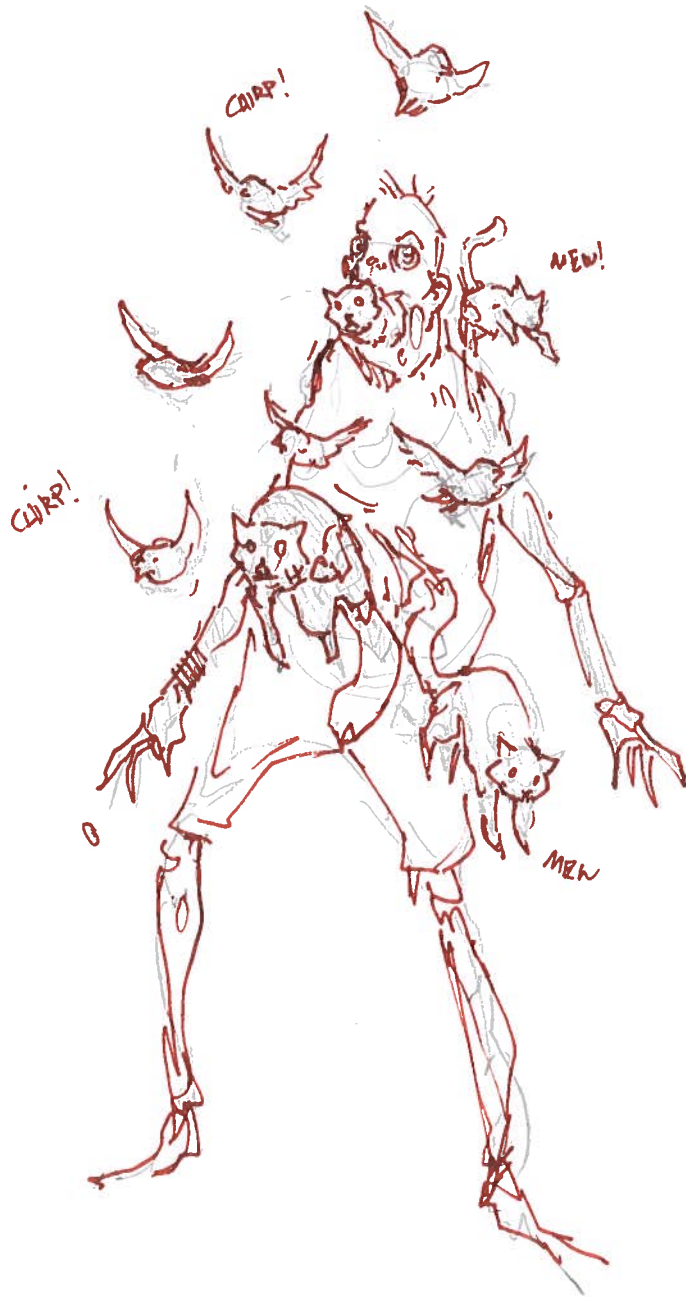
Curse. These glasses are cursed, and becoming attuned to them extends the curse to you. While you wear them, you have disadvantage on all saving throws to resist the pixelating curse. If you become cursed while wearing the glasses, the physical symptoms spread from the inside out, though your eyes transform immediately into solid cubes. Creatures at mental level 3 of the curse attempt to hide this from other creatures as long as possible.

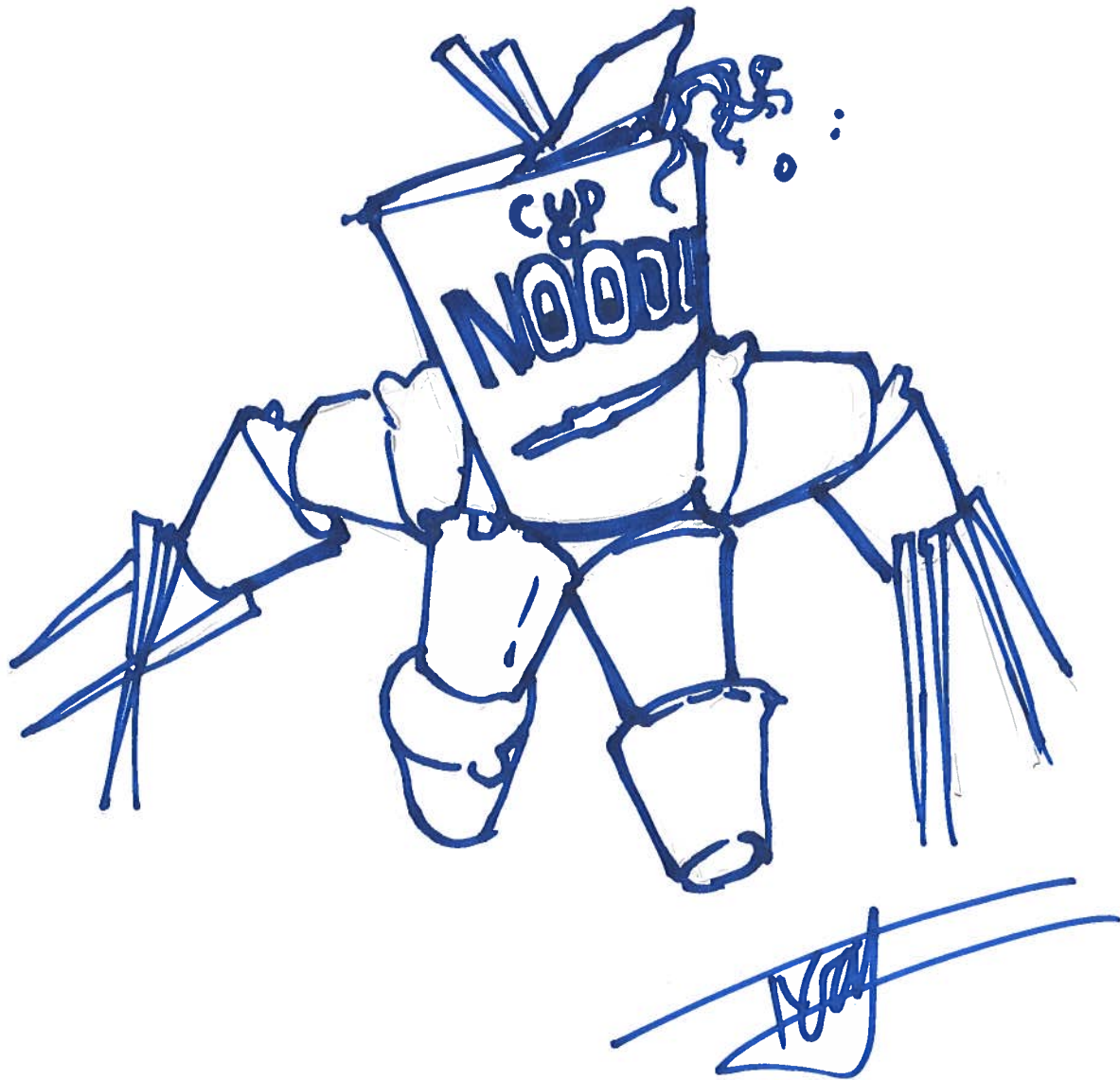


GUMMY
SPAWN
of KYUSS



Stan!



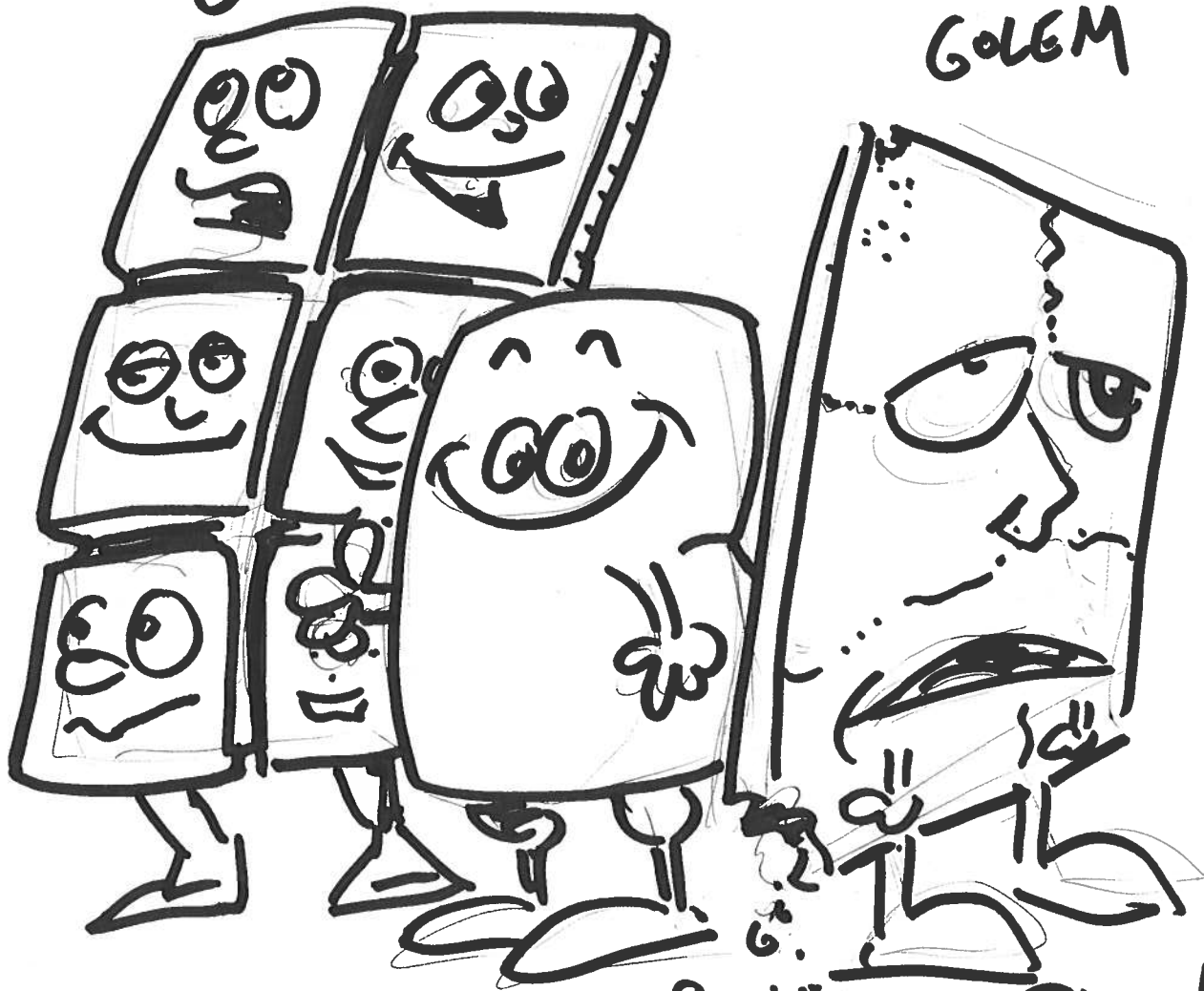




THE PARA-ELEMENTAL S'MORE

CHOCOLATE BAR
GOLEM SWARM

GRAHAM
CRACKER
GOLEM



MARSHMALLOW
ELEMENTAL

Stan!





STAN!

FLYING UNICORN (MOUNTED)







TARRASQUE SALIVA

HOLIDAY TREE

TENSIL →





Fiction: Neera - Final Exam & Best Friends

The hidden past of Beamdog's wild mage, Neera
—how a staff was gained and a forest
imperiled...

Part 1: Final Exam

“Oh, my aching noggin.” Moth cradled his head as he slumped down the great oak’s winding ramp. His iridescent wings drooped.

“You should know better than to drink so much nectar the night before class.” Pollae planted the foot of her oaken staff in the moss and raised a fine elven eyebrow to look down at him.

Neera didn’t like the way Pollae used her height to belittle the pixie. At barely over two feet high, Moth was small even for a sprite. He had spent half the night flitting from bloom to bloom, sampling every night-blossoming flower he could find.

Neera understood the allure of spring. The same perfumes had tempted her outside to tease the boys when she knew she should be studying. As a result, Neera was also completely unprepared.

As usual.

“Lean over the rail if you’re going to throw up,” said Binster.

“Don’t say ‘throw up’!” moaned Moth.

“Sorry. Still, you can lean against the rail for support.”

For a gnome, Binster was depressingly practical about the most mundane things. Unlike every normal person who looked out across the village and saw vibrant leaves and blooming garlands, Binster saw only the utility of the railing. With an imagination like that, Neera thought, Binster would turn out to be a lousy illusionist. Still, the way he comforted Moth gave her an idea.

“If you time it right, Moth, you can hit that wagon.” Neera pointed down at an approaching haywain jiggling and hopping over the roots below. Its erratic motion made her feel queasy, and she hadn’t had a drop of nectar.

At the sight of the careening wagon, Moth clutched his stomach and burbled. “Stop it, Neera,” said Binster. “You know how suggestible he is.”

“I’m not just saying he’s going to throw up. I’m saying when he does, it’ll be right on that wagon. In fact, I’ve got half a dozen faerie-lace ribbons that agree with me.” From her belt pouch she drew out six shimmering lengths of gossamer, hand-woven by the tiniest atomies. “Want to bet?”

“No,” sniffed Pollae, but Neera saw the desire in her eyes. Pollae loved faerie lace, and she was never one to back down from a challenge. She was the best student in their magic class, and she never missed a chance to remind the others of that fact. Pollae eyed Moth. “How’re you feeling?”

“Better,” said the sprite. His cerulean eyes had lost some of their luster, but he was no longer puffing his cheeks like a landed carp.

Pollae turned on Neera with a savage smile. “You’re on.”

“My faerie lace against that old staff of yours.”

What? This was my grandfather’s!”

“Steady on, Moth.” Binster knelt beside the sprite and patted him on the back.

“Don’t jostle him!” Pollae and Neera cried in unison.

Moth opened his mouth to say something, but only a golden bubble

emerged.

“Very well, your lace against my staff,” said Pollae. “But neither of us can touch him or use any magic.”

“Agreed.”

Pollae turned to Moth. “Close your eyes. Don’t look down. You aren’t going to throw up.”

“Don’t say ‘throw up,’” said Binster.

“He doesn’t have to look down to know he’s going to throw up,” said Neera. The wagon drew closer. “Moth can hear as well as we can just how wobbly that wagon is, rattling over every pothole in the path, throwing up stones with every lurch. Why, the sound itself is enough to make you—”

Repetition wasn’t working. Neera chanted in desperation: “Barf, vomit, hurl, gag, cast a *color spray*, sick up, spew—”

A glittering stream of pixie puke arced down on the haywain.

“Bull’s eye!”

By the time Neera had claimed her prize, soothed the angry driver, helped clean up Moth, and dashed across the village, the other students—all of them young elves—had already assembled.

Unlike most of the village tree-chambers, the classroom stood only a few feet above the forest floor. A domed roof sheltered it from rain, but all the shutters had been removed, leaving it open to the breeze except where it abutted one of the giant oaks for which the High Forest was famous.

The teacher whisked his tail as the latecomers rushed up the ramp. After glancing at the others, especially Moth, who hung on to Binster for dear life, his gaze came to rest on Neera. The centaur quirked a shaggy eyebrow at the sight of Pollae’s staff nestled in the crook of Neera’s arm. “Late again.”

“Not my fault,” said Neera.

Frixis stared at Neera as if she'd just confessed to a crime. His fingers idly touched the beads braided into his magnificent green beard. He was the hairiest centaur anyone in the High Forest had ever seen. It was impossible to see where his beard ended and his chest hair began. He had never approved of Neera's sense of whimsy nor her peculiar approach to magic.

Centaur's were not known for their skills at arcane magic. Through relentless discipline, Frixis had achieved such skill that the elves of Highbough made him the instructor for their magic school. When Neera had first applied, she impressed the centaur by demonstrating great natural potential, despite having none of his discipline. She had only disappointed him ever since.

Neera didn't see magic the way Frixis did. She understood the mechanical aspects of casting a spell—the words to speak, the gestures to make, even the physical materials (nasty as some were) necessary to call the magic from its source—but she felt deep in her being that much of the rigmarole was unnecessary. Studying all of the theory and history of magic was like reading a book to learn how to dance. The way Neera saw it, either you could dance or you couldn't. Likewise, either you were a mage or you weren't, and no amount of studying would change that.

Still peering at Neera, Frixis said, “Which of you wishes to demonstrate your new spell for the class?”

Neera wished she had prepared an *invisibility* spell to vanish from sight, but the centaur kept staring straight at her. Fortunately, to either side of Neera, her friends threw up their hands.

Pollae and Binster were always the first to volunteer, and both were always prepared. Neera was sure the gnome had gotten that seam on the tip of his long nose by sticking it too deep into his books. “Very well,” sighed Frixis. “Pollae first.”

Binster sighed his disappointment, which only encouraged Pollae. “Perhaps it would be nice to have a well-mannered gnome in class, for a change.”

She faltered for an instant as she moved to gesture with the staff she had lost in the bet. It would be a lot harder to look down at Neera

after that defeat. Pollae performed the gestures by hand, spoke the words, and with a glimmer appeared to transform into an exact duplicate of Binster. To complete the illusion, she mimicked his heavy sigh.

Laughter from the other students rewarded her effort.

Binster snorted. “That’s nothing. I can do twice as well.” With a two-handed gesture and a few arcane words whistling out of the gap between his front teeth, he caused his own image to shudder and divide into several duplicates. Each stepped away from him until four identical Binsters stood with their hands on hips, smug smiles returning Pollae’s scowl. They said in unison, “Four! Four times more gnome!”

Again the other students laughed. Frixis nodded his approval. “Now, who will be next?”

Moth’s wings perked up. “Those are just illusions,” he said. With a few arcane words of his own, the pixie grew taller, his wings shrinking into his body as his flesh and clothing changed shape until they matched Binster’s features exactly. “This is a real transformation.”

“Very good, Moth,” said Frixis. “Now, Neera—”

“I didn’t know we were doing illusions,” she complained. Fire and lightning were more her style, any form of energy she could evoke from the raw fount of magic.

Frixis stamped a hoof on the hard oak floor of the classroom. Amplified by the domed roof, the sound echoed off the nearest tree-houses. From the nearest buildings, elven laughter replied to the centaur’s familiar gesture of impatience with a recalcitrant student.

“If I must,” huffed Neera.

“Take cover, everybody!” cried Darvoth. “Neera’s going to cast a spell!”

The pathetic thing was that everybody laughed, which Darvoth had been making happen ever since that first time Neera’s concentration wavered and a surge of wild energy turned what should have been a

simple levitation into a flock of sparrows who whitened the entire classroom in their fright.

Neera showed Darvoth her teeth. He wasn't even handsome compared to some of the other young elves. She liked him better when he'd been one of the boys fetching her flowers last night. Maybe making fun of her was his revenge for her sending him after buds she knew would not bloom for weeks yet. Or maybe he was just a jerk.

"Now, Neera," insisted Frixis.

As she raised her hands to make the opening gestures, Frixis shook his head at her and raised his own to show her the correct position. "Think," he said. "Focus, visualize the runes you studied."

That would be much more help if she had actually studied, Neera thought. She didn't understand why it was so important to do things exactly so. Why wasn't there any room for improvisation, for her natural talent to come out? Master Frixis's corrections made her feel exactly the same way as when her writing teachers forced her to use her right hand instead of her left.

"Ffffpppptttt!"

Neera whipped her head around to see the origin of the rude sound. She imagined Binstor blowing a raspberry behind her back, but the six gnomes, one polymorphed pixie, one illusion-shrouded elf, and four reflections of the original, all stared back at her, mouths agape.

Just as her fellow students' laughter erupted louder than ever before, Neera realized the sound was that of her own spell fizzling.

All of the others in the classroom slapped their thighs, pounded on their neighbors' backs, or rolled on the floor. You'd imagine they had had never seen something so hilarious, thought Neera. She was the only one who didn't find it amusing, or so she thought until she saw Master Frixis shaking his head at her, his broad face a study in disappointment.

"Perhaps it is best that you go home, Neera."

Frixis had sent a student home from class only once before. Later

he'd gone to the boy's parents and counseled them to devote his energies elsewhere: farming, hunting, woodcarving, perhaps. He was not destined to be a mage.

"No, I can do it," said Neera. "Maybe not the image of a gnome, but—here, look!"

"Neera, don't."

She hastened through the gestures to call up an image of a fiery gnome above her palms. She felt the arcane energies respond to her will as much as to her gestures. This was more like it—the natural evocation of magic from its very source, not the careful teasing out of its threads for a spell practiced by thousands of other casters over the centuries. A brilliant orange flame blossomed in Neera's hands. She could even feel the heat of the illusion. This was no meager cantrip. This was real magic.

"Neera, look out!" cried one of the Binsters. He transformed back into the form of Moth even as he leaped away, pixie wings limned in fire.

"No! It was only supposed to be the illusion of fire!"

The flaming ball leaped from Neera's hands as if offended by her words.

"Stop!" she cried, feeling foolish even as she spoke. She focused her will on the flame, trying to control its motion with her thoughts.

Frixis flung a *ray of frost* at Moth, extinguishing the flames on the pixie's wings but sending the poor fey to the classroom floor, teeth chattering with cold.

The screams of young elves filled the classroom as students dashed away from the uncontrolled ball of fire. Only Darvoth stood still, his wide eyes locked on Neera as the fiery sphere rolled toward him.

"Don't, Neera," he said. "I'm sorry I laughed at you."

"I'm not doing it. I didn't mean—!"

Frixis charged in to scoop up the terrified Darvoth, but he was too late. Even as the centaur reached out his arms, Neera's conjured ball

of flame engulfed the boy. Darvoth screamed and turned to run. He made it almost to the edge of the classroom before Frixis knocked him over the edge onto the grass, shouting, “Roll it off! Roll it off!”

“What have you done!?” Pollae screamed at Neera. In her anger, she allowed the illusion to fall away, and the angry young gnome became an angry young elf.

“I didn’t mean it!”

“You never pay attention,” the four remaining Binsters scolded her. “Now look what you’ve done!”

“That’s not—I didn’t mean—oh, I hate you all!” Neera raised the staff she had won from Pollae, wanting desperately to hit someone. Pollae and the Binsters flinched and stepped back. When she saw the fear on their faces, Neera felt horrified—not by her friends, not by the situation, but by herself.

Tears on her face, she turned and ran away.



Part 2: Best Friends

Neera concentrated all her will on the spell’s gestures. At the first tingling of magic between her thumb and forefinger, she spoke the words to open a channel between the material realms and the plane of fire.

A fan of bright flame engulfed the firewood she had stacked on a clear patch of earth. Even as the spell subsided, the flames crackled and grew. The light dispelled a little of the gloom that surrounded them as dusk settled over the High Forest.

“You’re the best, Neera!”

Ettin glided down from a tree branch to land on the blanket Neera had laid beside the fire. The glow of the flames emphasized the tressym’s bifurcated face, half black and half tabby, one eye blue and one green. He stretched his feathered wings and began licking the blackened stump of his tail.

“You don’t need to be so sarcastic. How many times do I have to

apologize?”

Ettin ignored her.

Neera laid down the staff she'd won from Pollae, surprised how much she missed the annoying elf along with her other friends. After the horrible accident in class, she doubted anyone missed her.

She pulled her cloak tight and curled up on the blanket, trying to win back some of the territory the tressym had claimed. Despite Ettin's snarky attitude, the winged cat was her best friend. Of course, these days he was also her only friend.

After weeks of sneaking back into the village for food and supplies, Neera finally plunged into the heart of the High Forest, hoping to find... she wasn't sure what she hoped to find. Some place where no one knew how much harm she'd caused back home.

“Maybe you should have put a ring of stones around the wood.”

“Maybe you should have put a ring of stones around the wood,” Neera mimicked him. Even as she said it, she wished she could have thought of a better comeback. She felt foolish.

“I'm only saying it would be safer with a ring of stones to contain the embers. There's been no rain for weeks, and the leaves are getting dry.”

“I thought you liked it dry. Cats are desert animals, aren't they?”

“I'm not a cat.” Ettin shifted, indignant, and began licking between his toes.

Neera was too tired to get up and lug a bunch of rocks over to the fire. She wished she knew a spell that would gather rocks for her.

More than that, she wished she could simply tap into the primal source of magic and use its power to do whatever she wished. That's what she should have been learning these past years, not all these formulas Frixis had made her and the other students memorize. Those with a direct connection to the Weave shouldn't be saddled with homework like ordinary sorcerers.

There was one spell Neera could cast that none of her classmates ever could: the reckless *dweomer* that connected her will to raw magic. With it she could do anything. The problem was in directing the magic to do exactly what she wished instead of, well, just *anything*.

Even the ordinary spells Neera knew still sometimes went wrong. Ettin had witnessed more than a few miscast *color sprays* and *chromatic orbs* since joining her. Neera had a growing suspicion that the tressym followed her only because she could capture an entire flock of partridges with a single *sleep* spell. Even though she could stuff them all into a bag for later, he insisted she leave one out for him to awaken with a surprise attack. He became a wild animal when eating. Neera could barely stand to watch as he plunged down from the air to dismember his meals.

If snide remarks and bloodthirsty eating were the worst she had to put up with, Neera was still glad for the company. In the months she had spent in the High Forest, Neera hadn't met anyone—or anything—that both could talk with her and didn't want to eat her.

The nights were frightening without company. Even after the trees began shedding their leaves, the thick canopy let hardly any moonlight through, rendering Neera's half-elven vision almost useless. Her sharp ears could still pick up the sound of everything that slithered, crawled, crept, or prowled, but that only made things much worse.

Ettin sat up straight, his black and orange ears turning.

“What do you hear?”

“Shh!”

Neera waited, hoping to hear the guttural clicking that Ettin made deep in his throat before pouncing on a mouse or other tiny prey. Instead, the two-faced tressym emitted a low growl rising in volume and pitch until he shrieked, “Orcs!”

Neera froze. Several times before she had spotted the raiders, always from a distance or by the foul campsites they left behind. They roamed in bands of one or two dozen, hunting game and pillaging small communities of elves or fey. Neera always changed course to

avoid them, remembering the horrible stories she had heard as a child. The stories always came from those who escaped, because no one who fought had survived.

Ettin flew up, his wings buffeting Neera's face as he leapt into her arms as she stood. The tressym sank his claws into her shoulder as she bent to pick up her staff. "Go! Go, go, go!"

Neera hissed in pain and then conjured an invisible sheath of armor around her body—not that it was any use against the sharp claws already clinging to her. She began to berate Ettin but fell silent as she heard the heavy footsteps. The orcs were already close.

"They saw your stupid fire!" Ettin leaped from her back and flew westward. "Everyone for himself!"

"Wait for me!" Neera tripped over the blanket and fell into the fire. She jumped up, slapping away the flames even as she ran after the tressym, the smoldering blanket still tangled around one ankle. Cinders fell from her clothes, popping in the dry leaves, until at last she kicked away the flaming cloth.

Neera pumped her legs, trying to keep up with Ettin. She could barely see him in the thickening gloom. "Wait!"

The sound of charging orcs came closer and closer. Soon Neera heard grunts of exertion and the snapping of branches. She imagined ropes of drool dangling from tusked mouths. She envisioned blood-encrusted axes clutched in rough gray hands. She knew she couldn't run fast enough to escape. She would have to fight.

"You won't take me," she swore. Turning, she raised the staff in one hand and made a gesture of rolling waves with the other.

She felt the trembling magic of her spell in her heart for an instant before it shot down her arm and out through her fingers. The nearest orcs uttered drowsy groans and tumbled forward, asleep before they hit the ground.

"Yes!" Neera hopped in triumph. But before her feet hit the ground, a second wave of orcs rushed toward her.

With a gulp, Neera made another hasty gesture, this one no mere

enchantment but a spell to alter the very fabric of reality. A fan of vivid light shot forth, briefly illuminating the forest in a riot of colors. It enveloped another squad of orcs. Their eyes rolled back in their heads, their tongues lolled, and they fell senseless to the forest floor.

“Take that, you tusk-faced twerps!”

A scream dispelled her victory whoop. Yet another group of orcs barreled toward her, orange flames rising behind them. From one glance at their ugly, terrified faces, she knew they were not running toward her so much as they were fleeing the fire that she had caused in her panic.

“Don’t just stand there, Neera,” cried Ettin. His voice faded as he heeded his own advice. “Get out of there!”

Neera considered casting another spell, but she saw there were far too many orcs for any of her spells to stop. She ran through the darkness.

For what felt a very long time, she dodged tree trunks and ducked under tree branches. Her foot caught the root of a gnarly oak. She stumbled but caught herself on the staff before falling. She dared a glance back.

Behind her, the forest crackled and smoked. The light of the flames danced higher, casting dancing shadows in all directions. One of those shadows came up alongside her.

For a moment Neera imagined a tree had overtaken her in her flight, but then she saw it was a panicked orc running past her, fear of the fire hastening its stride. A moment later Neera realized there were two more orcs on her other side. Another joined them, and another more.

Glancing at their fellows to either side, the orcs seemed not to notice Neera. Then one of them looked back at her, his tiny black eyes widening in surprise. Then his terrified expression transformed into an ugly leer.

“Elf!” he shrieked, raising a spiked club.

” *Half-elf, boar-brains!*” Neera planted her heels and the butt of her staff. Her mad hope that the orcs would keep running melted away as

six of them stopped fleeing the fire. The firelight at her back faded, and Neera heard distant voices. “Help!” cried Neera. “There’s orcs! Piles of smelly orcs!”

The brutes snuffed like pigs. As they closed in around her, Neera realized the wet snorting was the sound of their laughter. “Stupid elf, there’s nothing in these woods but you, us, and the trees.”

Neera raised her staff. For an instant, all the orcs flinched. Neera wanted to say something dramatic and intimidating like, *Fear the power of my magic unleashed!* But she was afraid she’d stutter or sound childish. Besides, she needed to save her breath for a spell. The only question was, which one?

The forest was already burning, she decided, and the orcs had run from the flames. What’s the harm in a little more fire?

Neera reached deep within her connection to the arcane. The border between her world and that of the Weave felt like a gossamer veil, a curtain she could part not with her hand but with her will. She opened it as wide as she dared, willing—and hoping—for fire.

Fire she got.

Flames exploded all around her. For a timeless instant, she saw the orcs blasted up into the arms of the trees, their few remaining leaves burned away to leave bare branches limned with flame. The pressure of the blast blew inward as well as outward. Neera felt it crushing in on her from all sides. The heat scorched her body and simultaneously flooded her limbs with cool tingling, an ecstasy of pain.

Neera wobbled until she remembered to lean against her staff. The trees swayed around her in the aftermath of the explosion. The sound of their creaking became louder and more rapid.

An enormous shadow fell across Neera. She turned to see a gigantic tree falling straight down at her.

“No!” Neera held up the staff, knowing she didn’t have the strength to ward off a falling sapling, much less a full-grown tree. As tough branches enveloped her body, she cried out at first in terror, then in wonder as she realized the tree was not crushing her but lifting her

up.

“Why did you do this?” groaned a voice as deep as Razorthorn Rift. A crack in the tree trunk moved in time with the words: It was a mouth! Lumps she had mistaken for knots in the wood were eyes blinking away the smoke.

She was in the clutches of a treant, a breathing, walking tree-person!

“Didn’t you see all the orcs?” Neera peeped. “There were piles of them.”

“Even the orcs know better than to set an open fire in autumn.”

“I warned her,” Ettin’s voice came from a higher branch. “She wouldn’t listen to me.”

“There is no place for a firebug in Turlang’s Wood,” rumbled the treant.

“Who do you think you are, telling me where I can and can’t go? You have no right!”

“I am Turlang.”

“Oh,” said Neera. “Turlang’s Wood. Huh. I guess you do have a right.”

“Begone, you little catastrophe.” Turlang set Neera on the ground. She saw other treants shaking their stream-wetted boughs over the flames, trying to contain the damage she had caused. One treant nudged some sleeping orcs with a root-like toe. The brutes awoke with a snort, saw the treants in their midst, and fled northeast without bothering to pick up their weapons.

“Where will I go now?” Neera complained.

“I do not care,” said Turlang. “As long as it is anywhere but here.”


“Come on, Ettin,” said Neera. It took all her pride not to sulk. “We’d better go.”

“No way, Neera,” said the tressym from the safety of Turlang’s boughs. “I’m staying right here where it’s safe.”

“What? After all the game my spells caught for you?! I’m the best friend you ever had!”

“You not only set the forest on fire, you turned your own hair pink,” said Ettin. “”Neera, you’re the worst!”

Neera lifted a lock of her hair, but in the light of the fire she couldn’t tell whether it remained pale blond or really had changed. Grimacing back her tears, Neera fled southwest into the dark woods.



Recruit Neera in Beamdog’s *Baldur’s Gate* , *Baldur’s Gate: Siege of Dragonspear* , and *Baldur’s Gate II Enhanced Editions*. As an added bonus, we’ve worked with the folks at Beamdog to also provide the following fifth edition character sheet for Neera.

[Download Character Sheet](#)



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D&D BEYOND

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STRENGTH

DEXTERITY

CONSTITUTION

INTELLIGENCE

WISDOM

CHARISMA

- ___ Strength
- ___ Dexterity
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Neverwinter's Amazing New Acquisition

How do you get the Acquisitions Incorporated crew interested in a Neverwinter franchise? Pitch them some prime real estate (not to mention sweet tax incentives from Lord Neverember himself). *Dragon+* spoke with Penny Arcade's Jerry Holkins and *Neverwinter* Lead Designer Thomas Foss about a tantalizing opportunity.

It seems like a match made in the Seven Mounting Heavens of Celestia. Acquisitions Incorporated began as an audio podcast in May 2008 and has since grown into a theatre-filling live show; while the free-to-play *Neverwinter* MMORPG is also kind of a big deal with over 18 million players. So a visit from some of Faerûn's most famous characters to help establish an Acquisitions Incorporated franchise seems long overdue.

The deal to bring the two companies together was first pitched when *Neverwinter* Lead Designer Thomas Foss met Penny Arcade co-founder Jerry Holkins at the [Stream of Annihilation](#). As Holkins

remembers, it was a serious proposition from the start.

“You have bar conversations with people where you say things like, ‘Yeah, we should start a brewery!’ Very rarely are breweries started out of conversations like that. It’s not that no breweries are ever founded. But 100 per cent of those suggested breweries are not founded. This conversation had a different tenor,” he tells *Dragon+*.



(Select to view)

“I could tell it was something the Neverwinter team really, *really* wanted to do. And Acquisitions Incorporated is one of the pillars of what we do here at Penny Arcade. So the idea of establishing a franchise location in the *Neverwinter* MMORPG—if I had tried to explain this to twelve-year-old me, I would not have parsed it. Also, twelve-year-old me would be very frightened to see a future version of himself. There would be a lot of complications with that interaction, not least of which he wouldn’t believe that Acquisitions Incorporated was going to be in *Neverwinter*.”

Foss describes the initial meeting as an “elevator pitch” when he found himself standing next to Holkins and employed the kind of business acumen Acquisitions Incorporated CEO Omin Dran would understand.

“I thought, ‘Why not go for it?’ So I pitched Jerry a hard business sale. Following that, my Executive Producer Gordon and I went up to

see the guys with a slideshow pitch that was totally *Glengarry Glen Ross*, including the business incentives and tax breaks *Neverwinter* would give them. I had slideshows of their proposed headquarters in Protector's Enclave, saying: 'Look, it's right next to the marketplace and the auction house. It's a prime real estate location!'"

Following some back and forth on contract negotiations—which is totally on-brand for Acquisitions Incorporated—the deal was struck.

"I really gave it the hard sell and it seemed to pay off," adds Foss. "At one point I even offered to give them Gordon's watch if they signed today, much to his chagrin."

Whether Gordon still has that watch or not is a secret neither side is willing to share.



(Select to view)

ELECTRIC DREAMS

With freshly dried ink on contracts, the new partners set about transferring the wit and fun of the live Acquisitions Incorporated games into the digital realm. Cryptic Studios sent Foss and Story Lead Randy Mosiondz to work with Holkins and Mike Krahulik. Using videos and maps of existing locations in *Neverwinter* they brainstormed ideas to tell a new story.

“Once everybody was on board to create *The Heart of Fire* campaign then it was really exciting because we could get into the meat and potatoes of the story and start scouting locations, to turn this really cool idea into a brewery,” says Foss. “And we didn’t have to do much to bring out the fun storytelling because it’s Mike and Jerry *being* Mike and Jerry.”

Foss also used the opportunity to make one of his long-term ambitions come true in *Neverwinter* by including a famous statue from D&D lore.



(Select to view)

“Acquisitions Incorporated is always about acquiring and finding new stuff. So I threw something out to them I had been trying to get into the game for a very long time, which is the big statue of Moloch from the 1978 *Player’s Handbook*. You see those characters digging the giant gems out of the statue’s eye and there’s dead lizardfolk everywhere. So part of my pitch to Jerry was, ‘How do we make this happen?’ And he started rolling off this story.”

That storyline will also take *Neverwinter* players to places they’ve never been to before. Holkins describes the production process as being similar to a Hollywood movie experience, including scouting locations for shots. That included areas and elements regular players can’t reach, such as the enormous frost giant visible from afar in

other modules.

“We asked, ‘Can we use that giant in the distance?’ And the answer was that players can’t really go there. But our response was, ‘We have an effing airship. Let’s go there!’ So we went through it scene by scene and figured out the basic core of the story we wanted to tell.

“There are also some novel bits of lore in there for Acquisitions Incorporated enthusiasts. The airship is such an iconic part of our game there was never a point where it wasn’t going to be in there. It’ll be a lot of fun to discover the short story explaining how it came to be, which I thought was really neat.”

Foss reveals that the airship also created a fun new cinematic way to travel in the game. “As a designer having an airship that players can travel anywhere to—in that kind of Indiana Jones dot, dot, dot on the map kind of way—was super-awesome. It meant we didn’t have to use portals all the time.”



(Select to view)

The Acquisitions Incorporated storyline also includes a new skirmish for players to take on. Tying into the current D&D *Waterdeep* adventures it sees players rescuing a lord of Waterdeep and defending the bank vault in Protector’s Enclave. Standing alongside them to safeguard that building is Jim Darkmagic, armed with his *Wand of Wonder*.

“There is a ton of dialogue in that section specifically around the *Wand of Wonder*. I think those interactions include more dialogue than any other section of the game,” says Holkins, before Foss adds, “It’s a really fun but very challenging skirmish and I think players are going to have a blast tackling it.”



(Select to view)

ALL INCLUSIVE

In order to make the Acquisitions Incorporated storyline available to everyone as quickly as possible, the campaign has a low starting point. After around an hour-and-a-half of gameplay in *Neverwinter* characters should have reached fifteenth level and will be able to become an intern at the famous adventuring company. As characters continue to level through the game, Acquisitions Incorporated will offer them a new job every five to 10 levels.

“It’s designed to be a part of your career. So if you already have an advanced character you can go back and play through this,” says Holkins. “And if you’re starting fresh, the idea is that Acquisitions Incorporated will be calling on you as you advance through the game.”



(Select to view)

Foss confirms that characters can progress from being an intern to eventually becoming a greater part of the organization. Much like the Acquisitions Incorporated weekly streamed spin-off show, The “C” Team, players will join the “N” team-where the “N” stands for Neverwinter (Amy Falcone, who plays Walnut Dankgrass in the “C” Team, also lends her voice to this Neverwinter adventure).

“I hope that people will clamor for additional ways to build their status within our organization and that we’ll be able to do extra stories,” Holkins continues, confirming that this adventure isn’t a one-off. “Then we’ll be able to include characters like Viari and tell more stories. Once we’ve established a foothold this is a place that we can really live in. I hope to bring my own campaign into *Neverwinter* to get a healthy interplay between our livestreaming games, our stage shows, and the other content we can include.”

Rumor has it that future material could include slam poetry from Omin Dran, paying homage to the end performance Holkins gives at the live stage shows. It’s possible Neverwinter’s dialogue system could even be used to host a poetry-themed slam event, so watch this space for more on those updates.



(Select to view)

BREATH OF FRESH AIR

With five years under its belt, Foss says *Neverwinter* was looking for a way to offer a break from the norm and getting the Acquisitions Incorporated team on board has certainly achieved that.

“Neverwinter just celebrated its fifth year, so the idea was for this module to be a breath of fresh air. It’s like in *Grey’s Anatomy* where they’ll do the musical episode,” he adds. “I can tell you that during playtests here at work you can hear all the developers laughing. So it’s a big win.

“Anybody who is anybody wants to be up on that table on the stage playing D&D with these guys when they do their live events. And this is their chance. That’s the awesome bottom line of what we’ve created: you get to play Dungeons & Dragons with Acquisitions Incorporated.”



(Select to view)

The Acquisitions Incorporated *Heart of Fire* campaign featuring Jerry Holkins as Omin Dran, Mike Krahulik as Jim Darkmagic, and Amy Falcone as Walnut Dankgrass is available now in the free-to-play *Neverwinter* MMORPG.

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Next Issue: Dragon+ 23

Join our stream of consciousness in the next exciting edition of *Dragon+*!



We like to think we're pretty generous here at *Dragon+*, dropping presents for our readers no matter what the season. That gets ramped up in our end-of-year issue as we highlight the kind of gift giving that will cause even Scrooge-like family and friends to crack a smile.

Our glitter-fueled selection will be chock-full of goodies for the discerning gamer. One added joy of this glitzy gift guide is that we're purely digital, so you won't find virtual glitter still falling out of books or making an unwanted (and frankly unbelievable!) appearance in your socks in six months' time. Phew.



Having provided the sneakiest of peeks at last-character-standing card game *Dungeon Mayhem* this issue we'll take a deeper dive into this action-packed D&D spinoff next time around. We'll also have new fiction, lists of character options and companions, and our next round of cartoons; plus, a special feature on how the game is played by the visually impaired.

There's all this, plus more exclusive previews, another delve into the imposing *Dragon* archive, and all our regulars like maps of the month, a selection of the best video and audio highlights, and much more!

(Contents subject to change)



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